



Yvain

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# Yvain

*The Knight of the Lion*



Chrétien de Troyes • *Translated by Burton Raffel*

A new translation of a twelfth-century tale of romance and adventure

Yvain

# **Yvain: *The Knight of the Lion***

Chrétien de Troyes

*Translated from the Old French by Burton Raffel*

*Afterword by Joseph J. Duggan*

Yale University Press  
New Haven and London

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*for Eli Sagan, of course*

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## Translator's Preface

My basic text has been Chrestien de Troyes, *Yvain: Le Chevalier au Lion* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1967), incorporating the critical text of Wendelin Foerster and with an introduction, notes, and glossary by T. B. W. Reid. I have sometimes disagreed with both Foerster and Reid as to matters of punctuation, and less often as to the precise meaning of a particular disputed passage. Two volumes I found absolutely indispensable are A.-J. Greimas, *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français, jusqu'au milieu du XIVe siècle* (Paris: Larousse, 1980) and Frédéric Godefroy, *Lexique de l'ancien français*, ed. J. Bonnard and Am. Salmon (Paris: Champion, 1976). I sometimes drew upon (and always enjoyed) William W. Kibler's beautifully written and sensitively conceived *An Introduction to Old French* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1984).

The most important decision for anyone translating a poem like *Yvain* is formal: what does one do, in Modern English, with Chrétien's octosyllabic rhyming couplets? His metre is plainly an impossible one for the English version of a poem of 6,818 lines. (For comparative purposes, note that *Beowulf* has 3,182 lines, and the *Odyssey* roughly 12,000.) The closest formal equivalent, iambic tetrameter, would be more than risky. One necessarily tends, given the physical constraints of the measure, to place the caesura after every second foot. The great strength of iambic pentameter, never more fully demonstrated than in the end-stopped couplets of Alexander Pope, is that the caesura not only can never be placed in the exact middle of the line, there being indeed no exact middle available in a line of five rather than of four metrical feet, but that the greater length of the iambic pentameter line encourages placement of the caesura after the first, second, third, or fourth foot—and also permits use of more than one caesura in a line. Two marked metrical pauses would annihilate an iambic tetrameter line, which as I say naturally and almost inevitably tends to break at the midpoint. This makes iambic tetrameter excessively even, often monotonous, and especially monotonous at any length greater than that of a short lyric. Not surprisingly, in this century it is a metre that has been little used, even in shorter poems. The only modern poet to

make extensive use of iambic tetrameter is AE (George William Russell). The best-informed and fairest critic of twentieth-century English and American poetry, David Perkins, rightly says that “the poetry of Russell is inadequate to its theme, but in his case the trouble is not his experience, which was surely genuine, but his lack of technical and imaginative . . . skill” (*A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976], p. 256). Metre is neither the beginning nor the end of Russell’s limitations, but it is a significant part of them.

Rhyme is an equally difficult matter. Not only is French considerably more rhyme-rich than is English, but it is also a syllable-timed rather than a stress-timed language. French prosody is therefore syllabic, while both the native form of English prosody—employed in the poetry composed during the Old English period, including *Beowulf*—and the combination of stress and syllable-count prosody worked out in England in the centuries after the Norman Conquest, rely heavily on stress patterns. Milton could argue against, and dispense with, the use of rhyme for his *Paradise Lost*. No French poet either could or did make the same argument or follow the same practice.

And both metre and rhyme played poetic roles, for Chrétien, that they play no longer. Chrétien wrote his poetry; it is not oral verse in the sense that Homer’s and much of Old English poetry have been shown to be. But like the other poets of his time, Chrétien regularly recited his poetry to the courtly audiences for whom it was written (as indeed *Aucassin et Nicolette*, perhaps half a century later, was alternatively recited, in its prose portions, and sung, in its poetic portions). “Since we lack access to native speakers of Old French,” as Kibler drily observes, “we cannot hope to acquire a perfect understanding of its pronunciation.” But we do know that “There was word stress (as in modern English) rather than only sentence stress (characteristic of modern French)” (Kibler, pp. 8—9). The movement of Chrétien’s verse, accordingly, is both designed for a distinctly colloquial mode and, in certain of its linguistic features, closer to English than the verse of, say, Racine or Baudelaire or Claudel. It is distinctly speech-like in syntax and lexicon. Rhyming octosyllabic couplets nicely carried those qualities, for Chrétien; they would not do the same for modern English or for modern English readers.

*Vers libre* (free verse), though it has become the prevailing prosody of our time, is not truly suitable as an equivalent to Chrétien’s couplets. The medieval concept of a quasi-epic romance requires an underlying formal prosodic regularity, a continuing sense for the audience (hearer or reader) of a reasonably uniform measure which can tie together an often episodic structure. To approximate Chrétien’s

verse movement and tone as closely as I could, I have therefore devised a flexible line of an invariable three stresses, but with varying numbers of unstressed syllables. In practice, this measure varies from an extreme of four total syllables to the opposite extreme of thirteen total syllables. A quick but probably largely accurate count reveals only five instances of these extremes, lines 4346, 5180, and 6341 having four total syllables, and lines 5855 and 5987 having thirteen total syllables. Only line 4632 has twelve total syllables. The vast majority of the lines in this translation are clustered within a range of six to nine syllables. The measure seems to me—and more importantly, seems to the scholars whose advice and criticism I have sought, notably Ronnie Apter, John Miles Foley, and Alexandra H. Olsen—to adapt well to the pace and to the moods of Chrétien’s measure.

The function of rhyme in a poem intended primarily for the ear, rather than for the eye, does not seem reproducible in modern English. Nor does rhyme seem either necessary, given the changed literary conditions of our era, or useful, given (as Milton declares in the prefatory note to *Paradise Lost*) that “Rime {is} no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse, in longer works especially.” As he adds, poets who have used rhyme have been obliged “much to thir own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse than else they would have exprest them.” Three hundred and more years after Milton wrote those indignant sentences, we no longer need to claim “an ancient liberty recover’d to Heroic Poem from the troublesom and modern bondage of Riming.”

This brief preface is not intended as either a historical or a critical statement. I should note, however, that the translation was undertaken because Chrétien is a great and influential poet who has been virtually nonexistent in English. Further, *Yvain* can be considered his masterpiece. It is fully as impressive as, though of course different from, such well-known twelfth-century works as *Le Chanson de Roland* and *La Poema de Mió Cid*. Those poems have been fortunate enough to find not only one but several superbly capable translators. Chrétien in general, and *Yvain* in particular, have not been so fortunate. It has been my hope to remedy a situation patently out of balance, and I will be content if this translation allows the modern English reader some reasonably clear view of Chrétien’s swift, clear style, his wonderfully inventive storytelling, his perceptive characterizations and sure-handed dialogue, his racy wit and sly irony, and the vividness with which he evokes, for us as for his twelfth-century audiences, the emotions and the values of a

flourishing, vibrant world. Chrétien is a delight to read—and to translate.

## **Acknowledgments**

In addition to the scholars already mentioned, I am deeply grateful to Professor Joseph J. Duggan, of the University of California at Berkeley, for agreeing to read through the entire translation with one of the most practiced and knowledgeable eyes in the literary world, for supplying the afterword, and for supplying the bibliography.

My largest debt, which is expressed in very brief form in the dedication, is to Eli Sagan, a distinguished psycho-sociologist who had the wit to put together Chrétien and myself and whose support in making the translation was literally indispensable.

B. R.

# Yvain: *The Knight of the Lion*

Chrétien de Troyes

*Artus, li buens rois de Bretaingne,  
La cui proesce nos ansaingne,  
Que nos soiiens preu et cortois . . .*

Arthur, good king of Brittany,  
Whose knighthood teaches us  
To be courteous, to be true knights,  
Held court as a king should  
On that holy day always           5  
Known as the Pentecost.  
The king was at Carlisle, in Wales.  
And after eating in those rooms  
The knights gathered there  
Where the ladies called them,           10  
And the young ladies, too, and the girls.  
Some gossiped, told and retold  
Stories, some spoke of love,  
The anguish and the sadness of Love  
And its glories, as Love's disciples           15  
And followers knew them, then  
When Love flourished, and was rich.  
But today Love is almost  
Deserted, its followers fallen  
Away, its worshippers gone.           20  
For those who practiced Love  
Could truly call themselves courtiers—  
Noble, generous, honorable.  
Love has turned into silly

Stories, told by liars                25  
Who feel nothing, know nothing, all talk  
And empty boasts, dishonesty  
And vanity and windy noise.  
How much better to speak of those dead  
And gone than bother with the living!                30  
Better a courtier, dead,  
Than a vulgar peasant, alive.  
I prefer to tell a tale  
Worth hearing of a king so famous  
That men still speak of him, near                35  
And far, for the Bretons have told  
His story truly: asleep  
Or awake, he is famous forever.  
And thinking of him we think  
Of those blessed knights, chosen                40  
To struggle for honor at his side.

    And that day those knights were astonished  
At the king, who rose and left them.  
And many knights were deeply  
Insulted, and said so, angrily,                45  
For no one had ever seen him  
Rise from a feast and go  
To his bedroom, to rest or to sleep.  
But that day he did, and the queen  
Kept him, and he stayed so long                50  
Beside her that he forgot himself,  
And forgot his knights, and slept.

    Sitting outside his door  
Were Sagremor and Kay  
And Dodinel and Gawain                55  
And also lord Yvain,  
And also Calgrenant,  
A handsome knight who'd begun  
Telling them a story—not praising  
Himself, but a tale of disgrace.                60  
And as he told his tale

The queen could hear him, and got up  
From beside the sleeping king  
And came out among them so quietly  
That before they knew she was there 65  
She appeared in their midst, and only  
Calgrenant, and no one else,  
Rose to his feet in her honor.

And Kay, with his slashing tongue,  
Savage and nasty, snarled: 70

“By God, Calgrenant!

What a prancing courtier you've become—  
How nice to see you so gallant,  
Surely the best of us all.

And you think so, too, don't you, 75  
In that empty skull. Oh, you do,  
You do. How fitting for my lady  
To find you more courteous than any  
Of us, and a better knight.

We couldn't be bothered to rise, 80  
I suppose; we're all too lazy  
—Or maybe we just didn't care!

By God, sir, we never  
Saw my lady until

You stood. That's all that happened.” 85

“Now Kay,” said the queen, “I think  
You'd burst, you really would,  
If you couldn't spill out that poisonous  
Spite you're always full of.

How mean and ugly, how base, 90  
To slander your friends like this.”

“My lady!” said Kay. “If we haven't  
Gained by your presence, allow us,  
Please, not to lose. I hardly  
Believe I've spoken a word 95  
I need to be scolded for. Please!

I beg you, say no more.  
There's neither sense nor courtesy

In preserving a foolish quarrel.  
Such words should stop right here;            100  
Let no one make more of them. Grumbling  
Be done: command our story  
Teller to finish, now,  
The tale he'd already begun."

And Calgrenant spoke up,            105  
Answering Kay's remarks:

"Sir! If there's been a quarrel  
It means little or nothing to me.  
And why should I be bothered?  
You may have been insulting,            110  
But no harm's been done. My dear  
Sir Kay! You've said such things,  
And often, to better men,  
And wiser, than me. Insulting  
Others is a habit with you.            115

Manure will always stink,  
And horseflies bite, and bees  
Buzz, and bores be boring.  
But excuse me, my lady, grant me  
Your leave to leave off my story.            120  
I beg you, please, not to speak  
Of it again, nor give me,  
By your grace, so unwelcome an order."

"My lady!" said Kay. "Everyone  
Here would be grateful to hear him.            125  
We all wish him to go on.  
Don't do it simply for me!  
But by the faith you owe the king,  
Your lord and mine, you'd do well  
To order him on, make him            130  
Continue."

"Calgrenant!"  
Said the queen. "Don't let yourself worry  
Over insults from our Lord Steward Kay!  
He's so used to speaking wickedness



One can hardly even scold him. 135  
I order you, and also implore you,  
Not to be angry on his  
Account, nor to keep from telling us  
Anything pleasant, because  
Of him. If you wish my love, 140  
Tell it again, from the start!"

"God knows, oh lady, what a terribly  
Painful demand you make of me.  
I'd rather have one of my eyes  
Plucked out than go on with my story, 145  
Except that I fear your anger,  
And so I do what pleases you  
However unpleasant I find it.  
But since you wish it, listen!  
Give me your ears and your mind! 150  
The spoken word is lost  
If your heart and your mind can't hear it.  
There are men, I assure you, who listen  
Happily and hear nothing,  
Men little more than ears, 155  
Their brains distant, detached.  
Words can come to the ear  
Like blowing wind, and neither  
Stop nor remain, just passing  
By, like fleeting time, 160  
If hearts and minds aren't awake,  
Aren't ready and willing to receive them.  
Only the heart can take them  
In, and hold them, and keep them.  
The ears are a road, a door, 165  
For the voice to reach the heart,  
And hearts accept the voice  
In themselves, though it comes through the ear.  
So anyone who truly hears me,  
Give me your ears and your minds, 170  
For my tale has nothing to do

With dreams, or fables, or lies,  
Like so many others have offered,  
But only what I saw myself.

It was almost seven years            175  
Ago, I was lonely as a peasant  
And hunting after adventure,  
Fully armed, exactly  
As a knight ought to be, and I came  
To a road on my right-hand side,            180  
In the middle of a deserted forest.  
It was a treacherous path, full  
Of brambles, choked with thorns.  
For all its obstacles, despite  
The effort, I followed that road.            185  
And for almost the rest of the day  
I drove my horse along  
That path, until at last  
I came out of Brocelande forest.  
And then I rode over open            190  
Fields and saw a tower,  
Half a Welsh mile distant,  
Or even less, but not more.  
Pacing my horse, I came  
To the outer wall and the moat,            195  
Deep and wide all around,  
And saw, standing on the bridge,  
He whose castle it was,  
A hunting hawk on his hand.  
I'd barely greeted him when he stepped            200  
Forward and grasped my stirrups  
And suggested I dismount. And I did.  
There was no point pretending, for plainly  
I needed shelter. And he told me  
A hundred times over, and more,            205  
That whatever road led me  
To his home was a blessed path.

And thus we crossed the bridge  
And came through the gate and into  
The courtyard. And there in the middle                    210  
Of his courtyard the lord of the castle

—To whom may God on high  
Repay the honor and the happiness  
He gave me that night—had hung  
A gong, not hammered of iron,                    215

Nor carved of wood, but cast  
In copper, and he struck it three times  
With a mallet tied to a post.

And all his household, who had been  
Inside, hearing that sound,                    220

And hearing his voice, came down  
And came out of his house, and hurried  
Into the courtyard. And some  
Took my horse from that courteous lord,  
Who was still holding it, and led it                    225

Away. And I saw coming toward me  
A young and beautiful girl.  
I watched with great interest: she was tall  
And slim and held herself well.

And quickly, deftly she helped me                    230  
Out of my armor, and draped  
Around me a short cloak,  
Peacock blue, fur-trimmed,

And the rest of them left and left us  
Alone together, not a soul                    235

In sight, which pleased me: there was nothing  
Else I'd rather have seen.

Then she led me to the loveliest lawn  
In the world, fenced all around  
With a wall, and sat me down.                    240

I found her wonderfully well-bred,  
Her words so well-chosen, and well-taught,  
And she so charming, so delightful,  
That I felt myself filled with pleasure

And hoped I might never again                    245  
Need to move. But darkness  
Betrayed me, night came, and the lord  
Of the castle came to find me,  
For the time to dine had come.  
I could hardly object, or delay,                    250  
And I went as he wished, at once.  
But that supper too went  
As I wanted, for she sat across from me,  
Which made everything well. And after  
That meal the lord of the castle                    255  
Told me he could not remember  
How long it had been since he'd sheltered  
A wandering knight, a true  
Knight errant, truly in search  
Of adventure, though over the years                    260  
He'd sheltered many a knight.  
And then he asked, in return  
For hospitality, if I  
Would return to his house, if I could.  
And I said, "Of course, dear sir!"                    265  
In honor, what else could I possibly  
Say? Deny so small  
A favor to so gracious a host?

I was very well lodged, that night,  
And as soon as one could see                    270  
The morning light, my horse  
Was ready, exactly as I'd asked  
The night before. I blessed  
My host and his lovely daughter  
In the name of the Holy Spirit,                    275  
And took my leave of them all  
As soon as I could. I hadn't  
Gotten far from that castle  
When I came to a clearing full  
Of wild bulls, savage beasts                    280

Fighting among themselves  
 And making so loud a noise,  
 And beasts so fierce and so reckless  
 That even the sight of them would make you  
 Afraid. And I was, and retreated,           285  
 For no animal alive is as fierce  
 And as dangerous as a bull. And I saw,  
 Sitting on a tree stump, a lowborn  
 Creature, black as a Moor,  
 Huge, and hideously ugly           290  
 —Indeed, so incredibly awful  
 That there are no words to describe him—  
 And holding a great club in his hand.  
 And riding toward this fellow  
 I saw that his head was bigger           295  
 Than a packhorse's, or any other beast,  
 His hair was tufted, and his forehead  
 Bald and wide as two outspread  
 Hands, his ears all mossy,  
 And immense, exactly like an elephant's,           300  
 His eyebrows huge, his face  
 As if flattened. He had eyes like an owl,  
 A nose like a cat, and jaws  
 Split like a wolf's, with a boar's  
 Wild teeth, all yellowed, and his beard           305  
 Was black, his moustache crooked.  
 His chin met his chest, his backbone  
 Was long and twisted. He was leaning  
 On his club, his clothes as wild  
 As the rest of him, neither cotton nor wool           310  
 But the hides of two fresh-skinned bulls,  
 Or two oxen, that he wore hanging  
 From his neck, one in front, one in back.  
 And this creature jumped to his feet  
 When he saw me approaching. I had no           315  
 Idea if he meant to attack me,  
 Or what he meant to do.

I was ready to fight if I had to,  
 And then I saw, as he stood  
 All calm and still, mounted 320  
 On a fallen tree, that he reached up  
 Seventeen feet, at least.  
 He watched me, still as a stone,  
 Speaking no more than an animal,  
 And I thought perhaps he had 325  
 No brain to speak with, nor a tongue.  
 So I got up my courage and I said:  
 "You, tell me, what are you,  
 Good, or evil, or what?"  
 And he answered: "I am a man." 330  
 "What kind of man?" "The kind  
 You see. I'm nothing but myself."  
 "And what are you doing?" "I'm here,  
 Guarding this herd near this wood."  
 "Guarding them? By Saint Peter in Rome! 335  
 No one commands these beasts.  
 And how could you guard such savage  
 Creatures in an open field  
 Or a wood or anywhere else  
 If they're neither tied nor shut in?" 340  
 "I guard them so carefully, and so well,  
 That they'd never leave this place."  
 "Ridiculous! Tell me the truth!"  
 "Not one of them would move an inch  
 If he saw me coming. Whenever 345  
 I get my hands on one  
 I twist their horns so hard,  
 For my hands are so strong, that the others  
 Tremble in fear and immediately  
 Gather themselves around me 350  
 As if to cry for mercy.  
 But no one else could do this,  
 Just me. Anyone approaching  
 That herd would be killed at once.

And so I'm the lord of my animals. 355

And it's your turn, now, to tell me

Who you are and what you want."

"I am, as you see, a knight,

Seeking what I cannot find:

I've hunted and I've found—nothing." 360

"And what are you trying to find?"

"Adventures, to test my bravery,

To prove my courage. And now

I ask you and beg you, if you can,

To counsel me, tell me—if you know one— 365

Of some adventure, some marvel."

"As for that," he said, "too bad.

I know nothing of any 'adventures.'

No one's ever told me

Any. But just try going 370

To a certain spring, near here,

And you won't come back so easily

If you do it the way you should.

There's a path, down over there,

That will take you where you want to go. 375

Go straight ahead, if you want

To get there right away.

It's easy to get lost if you follow

All those other paths.

You'll see that spring, it surges 380

And seethes, though it's colder than marble.

It's shaded by the most beautiful tree

Nature has ever made,

With leaves forever green,

Never falling in winter. 385

And an iron bowl hangs there,

From a chain just long enough

To reach the water. And next

To the spring you'll find a stone,

You'll see for yourself—I can't 390

Describe that stone, what it's like,

For I've seen no other like it.  
And then there's a chapel, a tiny  
Chapel, but very beautiful.  
If you'd like to sprinkle water                    395  
From the bowl across that stone  
You'll see such a storm that no animal  
Will stay in this wood—every buck,  
Every doe, every stag, every boar,  
And even the birds would run off,                    400  
Because you'd see such lightning,  
Such wind, and trees splintering,  
And such rain, and smashing thunder,  
That if you yourself can escape  
Without harm, without desperate struggling,                    405  
You'll have better luck than any  
Knight who ever lived.”

And then I left him there,  
After he'd shown me the path.  
I expect it was late in the morning,                    410  
And getting close to noon,  
When I saw the tree and the chapel.  
And I can swear, and I know  
It's true, that the tree was the finest  
Pine anywhere in the world.                    415  
No rain could ever fall hard  
Enough for a drop to pierce it,  
But would always roll off outside.  
And I saw the basin hung  
From that tree, hammered of the finest                    420  
Gold anyone could buy.  
And believe me, the spring brbbled  
And boiled like steaming-hot water.  
And the stone was an emerald, with holes  
Bored through, just like a wineskin,                    425  
And under it stood four rubies,  
Gleaming brighter and redder  
Than the morning sun, rising



Low in the east. And this  
Is what I saw, what I know: 430  
Not a word I speak is untrue.

I wanted to see the miracle  
Of storm and wind and rain.  
It was hardly wise, I admit it,  
And as soon as I'd done it I would 435

Have taken it back, if I could,  
But I took water from the bowl  
And sprinkled the stone, and more  
Than likely I poured too much,  
For I saw the sky ripped open, 440

And lightning flashes from fourteen  
Directions blinded my eyes,  
And the clouds let loose sheets  
Of snow and rain and hail.

The storm was so foul, so strong, 445  
That a hundred times I thought  
I'd be killed by bolts falling  
At my feet, and by falling trees.

I was frightened half out of my wits  
Till the tempest grew calm, and was gone. 450

But God gave me hope  
That the storm could not last long  
And soon the winds were at rest:  
They dared not blow against  
His will. And seeing the air 455

Clear and pure I was thrilled—  
For joy, as everyone knows,  
Let's sorrow soon be forgotten.  
When the storm had completely vanished  
I saw so many birds 460

In that pine tree (could anyone believe me?)  
That it looked as if every branch,  
Every twig, was hidden by birds.  
And the tree was even lovelier,  
For the birds all sang at once, 465

In marvellous harmony, though each  
Was singing its proper song  
And not a note that belonged  
To one was sung by another.  
And I gloried in their happiness, 470  
Listening as they sang their service  
Through, unhurried: I'd never  
Heard joy so complete,  
And no one else will hear it,  
I think, unless he goes there 475  
And can hear what filled me with joy  
And rapture so deep that I was carried  
Away—until I heard  
The sound of knights approaching,  
And it seemed to me there were ten: 480  
But the clatter and racket were made  
By a single knight, riding up.  
And when I saw him, coming  
Alone, I belted my saddle  
Tight, and mounted. And he came 485  
Angrily, riding swifter  
Than an eagle, looking as fierce  
As a hungry lion. And from  
As far as his voice could carry  
He began to hurl a challenge, 490  
Crying: "You! You've done me  
Harm, for no reason. You ought to  
Have challenged me, were there cause for a quarrel,  
Or at least demanded justice 495  
Before you began to make war.  
But sir! If it's in my power  
This destruction you see all about you  
Will fall on you. Here lies  
On every hand the proof 500  
Of my broken-up woods. And he  
Who is injured has a right to complain.  
And I do, and I'm right, for you've forced me

Out of my home with lightning  
And thunder and rain. You've made 505  
My life miserable and cursed be he  
Who thinks that good. Here  
In my wood, here in my castle,  
You've launched such an attack  
That no troops of soldiers, no weapons, 510  
No walls could have resisted.  
No one could have been safe,  
Even in a fortress: not even  
Hard stone walls could have helped.  
Understand me! From this moment on 515  
There's no truce and no peace between us!"

At those words we rushed at each other,  
Holding our shields in place,  
Each covering himself. The knight  
Rode a good horse, and his lance 520  
Was a stout one, and I have no doubt  
He sat a whole head taller  
Than I did. Which was my bad luck,  
For I was smaller than he was,  
And his horse was stronger than mine. 525

These are things I need to say,  
For they help explain my shame.  
I gave him as good a blow  
As I could, striking him hard,  
Hitting the top of his shield, 530  
And I struck so hard, with all  
My strength, that my lance was shattered.  
But his held together,  
It was hardly light, by my faith,  
But as heavy, I think, as any 535  
Lance I ever saw,  
Heavier and bigger than any.  
And that knight struck me so stinging  
A blow that it swept me backwards  
And off my horse and laid me 540

Flat on the ground. And he left  
Me there, shamed and exhausted,  
Not bothering even to look at me.  
He took my horse and left me there,  
And headed back the way        545  
He'd come. And I, dazed,  
Just lay there, anguished, confused.  
And then for a while I sat  
Near the spring, and rested. How  
Could I dare to follow the knight?        550  
What a fool I would be! And even  
Were I sure of my courage, where  
Had he gone to? I had no idea.  
And finally my promise came back to me:  
I'd told my host I'd return        555  
To his castle. I liked the idea,  
And that's what I did. But walking  
Was easier without my weapons  
And my armor, and I left them behind,  
And retraced my shameful steps.        560  
When I reached his home, that night,  
He treated me just as he'd done  
Before, good-natured, courteous,  
Exactly as I'd found him at first.  
I saw nothing, neither in him        565  
Nor in his daughter, that made me  
Feel less welcome, nor was anything  
Done to show me less honor  
Than they'd shown me the previous night.  
They did me great honor indeed,        570  
In that house, and I thank them. And they said  
No one had ever escaped,  
So far as they knew, from that place  
I'd gone to, without being killed  
Or taken prisoner. They'd never        575  
Heard a story like mine.  
And so I went, and so

I returned, feeling like a fool.  
And I've foolishly told you a story  
I'll never tell again." 580

"By God!" said lord Yvain,  
"You're my own first cousin, and we ought  
To love each other, but this thing  
You've hid from me, and hid for so long,  
Is folly, nothing less. 585

And when I say 'folly' to you,  
Please, I mean nothing offensive.  
Because if I can, and if fate  
Permits me, I will avenge you."

"Ah well, it's after dinner," 590  
Said Kay, who could never be quiet.  
"There are lots more words in a jug  
Of wine than a barrel of beer.

They say that a cat meows  
When it's full. No one moves after dinner 595  
But everyone's ready to kill

A sultan and avenge all his sins!  
Are your saddle-pads ready to go,  
Your iron leg-armor polished,  
Your banners unfurled? Quickly, 600

My lord Yvain! By God,  
Are you leaving tonight or tomorrow?  
Do let us know, fair sir,  
Just when you begin this ordeal,

So we all can escort you. Of course, 605  
All marshals and magistrates will want  
To ride at your side. And I beg you,  
However you arrange things, not  
To leave us without proper farewells.

And if your dreams are bad tonight, 610  
Perhaps you'd better stay home."

"The devil! Are you out of your mind,  
Sir Kay?" said the queen. "Is there no way

To stop your wagging tongue?  
Your mouth should be shamed by itself,           615  
Forever dripping bile.  
Plainly, your tongue dislikes you,  
For it always says the worst  
It knows about everyone you mention.  
Cursed be any tongue           620  
That can't say anything but wickedness!  
It's your tongue, working as it does,  
That makes everyone everywhere hate you.  
It couldn't do more to betray you.  
Listen: I'd charge it with treason,           625  
If that tongue were mine. And anyone  
Incurable ought to be tied  
In front of a church, like a madman  
Bound to the altar screen.”  
“Indeed, my lady,” said lord           630  
Yvain, “I don't mind these insults.  
Wherever he goes, Sir Kay  
Is so talented, so wise, and so honorable  
He could never be deaf or dumb.  
He knows how to answer abuse           635  
With good sense, and with courtesy, and he's always  
Done exactly that.  
You know how truly I speak.  
But I've less than no interest in quarrels  
Or beginning any foolishness. He           640  
Who starts a fight, who strikes  
The first blow, may not be the winner,  
But rather he who strikes back—  
And it's always better to quarrel  
With a stranger than insult a friend.           645  
I've no wish to act like a dog  
That bristles and bares its teeth  
Whenever another dog growls.”

And as they spoke, the king

Came out of his room, where he'd been 650

A long time. He'd slept until  
That very moment. And all  
The knights, as soon as they saw him,  
Jumped to their feet, but he ordered them  
Back to their seats, and sat 655

Himself next to the queen,  
Who told him Calgrenant's story,  
Repeating it word for word,  
Beautifully telling the tale  
As she knew how to do. The king 660

Listened with interest, then swore  
Three mighty oaths, by the soul  
Of Uther Pendragon, his father,  
And his son's soul, and his mother's,  
That he would go to see 665  
That fountain, and the storm, and all  
The marvels, in two weeks time,  
And swore he'd reach there on the eve  
Of the Feast of Saint John the Baptist,  
And there he would sleep, that night, 670  
And he said he would take along

Everyone who wanted to come.  
And everything the king had decided  
Delighted the entire court,  
For every knight and every 675  
Squire was desperate to go.

But in spite of their joy and their pleasure  
My lord Yvain was miserable,  
For he'd meant to go alone,  
And so he was sad and upset 680

At the king for planning his visit.  
And what bothered him most of all  
Was knowing that the right of combat  
Would surely fall to Sir Kay  
Rather than himself. If Kay 685  
Requested it, Kay would get it—

Or even Sir Gawain, if Gawain  
Chose to ask for it first.  
Either of them would have it,  
If either wanted it, and asked. 690  
And feeling no need for their company  
He decided not to wait,  
But to go alone, if he could,  
No matter for joy or for sorrow.  
They could stay at home, if they chose, 695  
But he'd made up his mind to reach  
Brocelande forest in three days,  
If he could, and try to find  
That narrow, overgrown path—  
And how anxious he was to see it!— 700  
And the open fields and the castle  
And all the pleasures and delights  
Of that courteous young woman, well-bred  
And beautiful to see, and that excellent  
Knight, her father, so concerned 705  
With honor, so honest and highborn,  
So worthy and generous and open.  
And then he would see the wild bulls  
And the giant creature who guarded them.  
It was hard for him to delay: 710  
Such a huge creature, immense  
And hideous, half-real, half-imagined,  
And dark as any blacksmith.  
And then he'd see, if he could,  
The stone and the spring and the bowl 715  
And the birds covering the pine tree,  
And he'd make it rain and blow.  
But he'd boast about nothing, and no one  
Would know what he meant to do,  
If he could help it, until 720  
It was done, for honor or for shame,  
And then he could let it be known.



So lord Yvain stole off,  
Making sure that he met no one,  
And went to his lodgings, alone. 725  
His servants and attendants were there,  
And he ordered his saddle put on  
And spoke to his favorite squire,  
One from whom he hid nothing.

“Now listen! Come after me, 730  
And bring my weapons and armor!  
I'm going out through that gate,  
Not on my war-horse, and only  
Walking him. Be careful, and hurry;  
I've a long, long way to go. 735  
I want new shoes on my war-horse,  
And I want him brought to me, and quickly,  
And I want you to bring back the other.  
But be careful, I warn you, and if anyone  
Asks where I've gone, be sure 740  
You tell him nothing. You may  
Have counted on me before,  
But never again, if you fail me.”

“My lord!” he said, “all is well.  
No one will learn a thing 745  
From me. Go! And I'll follow.”

So lord Yvain mounted,  
Meaning to avenge his cousin's  
Shame before he returned,  
If he could. His squire ran 750  
For weapons and the war-horse, and leaped up  
On its back. There was no delay,  
He had plenty of horseshoes and nails.  
Then he followed his master's tracks  
Until he saw him, dismounted, 755  
Waiting along the road,  
But off to the side, in a sheltered  
Spot. Armor and weapons

Were handed over, and put on,  
And once he was ready Yvain           760  
Wasted no time, but day  
After day hurried over mountains  
And across valleys and deep,  
Broad forests, and strange places,  
And wild places, riding           765  
Through dangerous ways with many  
Perils and many difficulties,  
Until he reached the right road,  
All choked with brambles, and dark,  
And then he felt himself safe,           770  
No longer able to lose  
His way. Whoever might have to  
Pay for it, he would not stop  
Till he saw the pine shading  
The fountain, and the stone, and the storm,           775  
And the hail and the rain and the thunder  
And wind. That night, to be sure,  
He was sheltered exactly as he'd hoped,  
And indeed he found his host  
Still better and even more honorable           780  
Than he could have expected, and as  
For the girl he saw a hundred  
Times more beauty and good sense  
Than Calgrenant had ever spoken of,  
For who can truly tell           785  
The worth of a lady and a knight?  
The moment a man turns toward  
Goodness, nothing can sum up  
His story, no tongue encompass  
The honors such a knight can earn.           790  
My lord Yvain slept well,  
That night, and was happy, and the day  
That followed showed him the wild  
Bulls and the creature who guarded them,  
Who showed him the path to take.           795

And yet he crossed himself  
A hundred times at the sight  
Of that monster, wondering how Nature  
Could make such ugliness, such horror.  
Then he went to the spring, and saw 800  
Everything he'd wanted to see.  
Not stopping for a moment, standing  
Erect, he poured the bowl  
Of water directly on the stone,  
And at once it blew and it rained 805  
And created the storm he'd been told of.  
And when God brought back fair weather  
The birds came to the pine tree  
And sang their wonderfully joyous  
Songs above that dangerous 810  
Spring. But before their rapture  
Ended, the knight appeared,  
Blazing with anger and pounding  
On the ground as if he were hunting  
A stag. And they rushed at each other, 815  
Fighting furiously, as if  
To show how they hated, and would kill.  
They each swung mighty lances,  
And slashed and smashed away  
Until both their shields were cracked, 820  
And their shoulder mail was broken,  
And their spears were split and splintered,  
With pieces flying in the air.  
Then they drew their swords and came forward,  
And the slicing of their swords cut through 825  
The straps holding up their shields,  
And the shields themselves were hacked  
To bits, from top to bottom,  
So the shreds hung down and neither  
Covered their bodies nor defended them, 830  
So split and torn that their gleaming  
Swords hit directly

On each other's sides  
And arms and hips. They went  
At each other savagely, desperately,           835  
Neither moving from his spot  
Any more than a block of stone.  
There were never two knights angrier  
Or more determined to kill or be killed.  
And they chose their blows with care,           840  
Struggling to make them work.  
Their helmets began to cave in,  
And break, and the metal in their mail-shirts  
Began to snap, and blood  
Began to flow, the mail           845  
Growing so hot it protected  
Their bodies no more than a cloak.  
Stabbing at each other's faces  
It was wonderful that so fierce and hard  
A fight could go on for so long,           850  
But both were knights of such heart  
And such courage that neither would ever  
Yield a foot of ground  
Until mortally wounded. And both  
Were as noble as brave, for neither           855  
Attempted to wound the other's  
Horse, neither wishing  
To stoop so low. They sat  
In their saddles the whole time, never  
Setting a foot on the ground.           860  
What a beautiful fight it was!  
And at last lord Yvain  
Shattered the other's helmet  
With a blow that stunned him, left him dizzy  
And weak and frightened, for no one           865  
Had ever dealt him such a terrible  
Stroke. Under his cracked  
Helmet his head was split  
To the brain, and blood poured

From his skull and stained his gleaming                    870  
Mail-shirt, and he felt such crushing  
Pain that his courage failed him.  
And indeed his heart did him  
No injustice, for he felt himself fatally  
Wounded and that nothing could save him.                    875  
And as fast as he could think, he turned  
And galloped straight toward his castle,  
Where the drawbridge was lowered and the gate  
Swung wide and open, with lord  
Yvain galloping after him,                    880  
Spurring his horse to its fastest.  
Like a falcon swooping on its prey  
When he sees it run, and almost  
Snatching it up, close  
But missing, so Yvain pursued him,                    885  
Almost able to grasp him,  
But just unable to reach  
Though so close behind he could hear  
The knight groaning in pain,  
Closer and closer, but unable                    890  
To catch him. And he rode still faster,  
All his effort lost  
If he can't get him, alive  
Or dead, for he remembered the taunts  
And insults spoken by Sir Kay.                    895  
Nor had he fulfilled the promise  
Made to his cousin, and no one  
Would ever believe him without  
Some true tokens of victory.  
Their galloping chase came straight                    900  
To the castle gate, and both  
Rode right in, but neither  
Man nor woman walked  
In those streets, as they galloped down them,  
Both of them riding swiftly                    905  
Right to the palace door.

Now that door was high and broad,  
But the entry was exceedingly narrow,  
So neither two men nor two horses  
Could go through at once unless            910  
They were crushed uncomfortably against  
One another, and directly in the center,  
For it was built exactly like a trap  
Set for a rat when he comes  
Hunting what was never his.            915  
And a sharp blade hung  
Up above, which shot viciously  
Down on its tracks when anything  
Touched its trigger, or even  
Came close, no matter how gently.            920  
And just below the door  
Were two hidden springs, connected  
To a sliding iron grate  
That could cut like a knife. If anyone  
Stepped onto this device            925  
The grate came sliding down  
And whoever was caught beneath it  
Was crushed, was cut to pieces.  
And just in the middle the path  
Narrowed so sharply that it might            930  
Have been a track through the woods.  
And knowing his way, the beaten  
Knight rushed through this passage,  
With lord Yvain dashing  
So closely behind him, galloping            935  
So fast that he reached out his hand  
And pulled at the bow of his saddle.  
And it was lucky he leaned so far forward,  
Stretching to grasp at his enemy,  
For without that bit of luck            940  
The grate and the knife would have chopped him  
In two, for his horse tripped  
The trigger, thundering across

The beams, and like a devil out of hell  
 The gate came crashing down, 945  
 Striking the saddle and the horse's  
 Hindquarters and slicing them through.  
 But lord Yvain, with God's  
 Great grace, was barely touched,  
 For the blade came level with his back, 950  
 Cutting off both his spurs  
 Just even with his heels. And as  
 He tumbled, terrified, to the ground,  
 The defeated knight with his mortal  
 Wound escaped him. There stood 955  
 Another gate, just beyond  
 The one where they'd been, and the knight  
 He'd been chasing rode straight on through  
 And it shut behind him, and so  
 He made his escape. And there 960  
 My lord Yvain was caught,  
 Tormented and at a loss,  
 Finding himself in this closed  
 Passageway, covered with a gilded  
 Ceiling, its walls decorated 965  
 With beautiful, expensive paints.  
 But nothing pained him so much  
 As not knowing just where the knight  
 He'd been chasing had vanished.  
 He stood uncertain, and then 970  
 A small door opened  
 In a small room close by,  
 And a girl came out, alone,  
 Beautiful and well-mannered, and then  
 She shut the door behind her. 975  
 And seeing lord Yvain  
 At first she was deeply distressed.  
 "Knight!" she exclaimed. "You've surely  
 Come in an evil hour.  
 If anyone sees you here 980

They'll cut you into tiny pieces,  
For the lord of this castle is mortally  
Wounded, and of course I know  
You've killed him. My lady's grief  
Is so powerful, and everyone around her            985  
Weeps so violently they're almost  
Ready to die of it, if they knew  
You were here! But their grief is so great  
That once they knew where you were  
They'd kill you, or capture you, as it pleased them,            990  
And nothing could stop them if they came  
To attack you." And lord Yvain  
Answered her: "And yet, if God  
So wills it, they'll neither kill me  
Nor have me in their hands." "No,"            995  
She said, "for I shall do everything  
I can to assist you. It's better  
For a knight not to be afraid.  
And I know you for a noble knight,  
Seeing how little you're frightened.            1000  
Understand me: I would do you honor,  
I would serve you, if I could, as you  
Have already done for me.  
My lady once sent me to Arthur's  
Court with a message, and I suppose            1005  
I was neither as wise nor as courteous  
Nor in anything what I ought to have been  
As a girl at the king's high court.  
And none of the knights would stoop  
To exchange a word with me,            1010  
Except you, who stand here now,  
But you, out of kindness and mercy,  
Were courteous and helped me. And for the honor  
You did me then I offer you,  
In exchange, this reward. I know            1015  
There is nothing you've asked. I know.  
But I knew you as soon as I saw you,



You're the son of King Urien, and your name  
Is lord Yvain. And you  
Can be certain, you can be sure,           1020  
That trusting my words, you'll never  
Be captured or hurt. Accept  
This little ring, and if  
You please return it to me  
When it's done its work, and you're free."           1025  
Then she gave him the little ring  
And told him it had such power  
That, just as bark hid the wood  
Of a tree, and no one could see it,  
So this ring would conceal anyone           1030  
Who wore it, as long as the stone  
Sat in his palm: there was nothing  
To fear from anyone if he wore it  
As she'd said, for no one could possibly  
See him, no matter how keen           1035  
Their eyes, any more than they saw  
Through bark to the wood underneath.  
And lord Yvain was happy.  
And when she'd told him these things  
She led him to a couch covered           1040  
With cloth so rich that the Duke  
Of Austria could never afford it,  
And sat him there, and said  
If he cared to eat she would fetch him  
Food. And he said he would.           1045  
And running into her room  
The girl returned, as fast  
As possible, with a roasted fowl  
And a cake and a tablecloth  
And a full jug of wine           1050  
Made from good grapes, and a white  
Goblet covering it, and invited him  
To dine. And needing that food  
He ate it gladly and with good will.

And when he had eaten and drunk                    1055  
Knights were hurrying through  
The castle, hunting him,  
For their lord, already lying  
On his bier, wanted revenge.  
And she said to him: "Friend!                    1060  
Do you hear? Everyone's hunting you.  
What a lot of noise they're making!  
But no matter who comes or goes  
Don't let their noise make you move,  
For there's no way they'll ever find you                    1065  
If you never move from this couch.  
Oh, this room will be full of men  
At arms, angry, fierce,  
Just wanting to find you out,  
And I suspect they'll bring the body                    1070  
In here, getting it ready  
For burial, and they'll crawl under benches  
And beds, seeking you. And you,  
A man who feels no fear,  
Ought to find it amusing,                    1075  
Seeing so many men  
So blind, so desperate and defeated,  
And all the time so deluded,  
That they'll be half mad with rage.  
I know nothing more to tell you,                    1080  
And I cannot stay here any longer.  
But I'm grateful to almighty God  
Who's given me this chance  
To do something that might please you:  
It's something I'd wanted to do."                    1085  
And then she went on her way,  
And after she'd turned and gone out  
Everyone else swarmed by,  
Rushing to the gates from both sides,  
Armed with clubs and swords,                    1090  
A huge crowd pushing

And shoving, furious, savage.  
And then they saw in front  
Of the gate the horse cut in half.  
And then they thought it was certain                      1095  
That once the gates were opened  
They'd find him in there, the man  
They wanted to kill. So they had  
Those gates drawn up, those gates  
That had killed so many men,                      1100  
And of course they set no trap  
Nor primed the springs, but rushed  
Across in a tumbling mob.  
And they found the other half  
Of the horse, dead, lying                      1105  
On the threshold, but none of them had eyes  
Keen enough to see  
Lord Yvain, though they'd cheerfully have killed him.  
And he watched their fury, as they stormed  
And screamed and ranted and roared.                      1110  
And they cried: "This is impossible!  
There's no window here, no door,  
That anything could get through, except  
A bird, which can fly, or a squirrel,  
Or perhaps a woodchuck or a rat                      1115  
Or something as small or smaller,  
For the windows are barred, and the gates  
Were all of them shut, as soon  
As our lord came through. His body  
Has got to be here, dead                      1120  
Or alive, for there's nothing out there.  
There's more than half the saddle  
Out there, we see that, all right,  
But there's nothing to be seen of him  
Except his cut-off spurs,                      1125  
Sheared away from his feet.  
Now! Let's hunt him in every  
Corner, and stop all this blather,

For he's got to be here, he's got to,  
Unless we're all bewitched            1130  
Or the demons of hell have taken him."

And so they all of them, wild  
With rage, hunted him all over  
The room, beating on everything—  
Walls and couches and chairs—            1135

But their blows never touched the couch  
Where Yvain lay resting, so nothing  
Hurt him. But they banged and smashed  
About so furiously, bashing  
Everywhere, fighting immense            1140

Battles like blind men in the dark,  
Pounding as blind men pound  
When they hunt what they cannot see—  
And then, suddenly, as they searched  
And searched again, under beds,            1145

Under stools, there appeared a woman  
As lovely as any creature on earth.  
No one had spoken a word  
Of so splendid a lady, and yet  
Her grief was so intense            1150

She seemed ready to take her own life.  
And then she cried out so loudly  
That she seemed to have exhausted herself  
And dropped to the ground, unconscious.  
And when they lifted her up            1155

She began to tear at her clothes  
Like a woman gone mad, and she pulled  
At her hair, and ripped it out,  
And she tore at her dress, and at every  
Step fell in a faint,            1160

And nothing could relieve her pain,  
For she saw her lord carried  
In and laid on his death bed,  
And all her happiness was ended,  
And so she cried and wailed.            1165

Holy water and the cross  
And uplifted candles were carried  
In front, by the nuns from a convent,  
And then came the Holy Word  
And incense and priests, the stewards            1170  
Of eternal absolution, which miserable  
Souls are always seeking.

And lord Yvain listened  
To that weeping beyond description,  
Which no words can describe, which never            1175  
Can be written in a book. And the solemn  
Procession went by, but then  
In the middle of the room a crowd  
Milled around the bier,  
For fresh red blood began            1180  
To run from the corpse's cold wounds,  
And this was positive proof  
That whoever had fought their lord  
In battle, and beaten him, and killed him,  
Was surely still there. And everyone            1185  
Hunted and searched again,  
And ransacked the room, and turned it  
Upside down, till they all  
Were sweating in confusion and pain,  
And all of it caused by that blood            1190  
Trickling down in plain sight.  
And this time blow after blow  
Fell on my lord Yvain,  
Where he lay, but he never moved.  
And the crowd grew wilder and wilder            1195  
As the wounds stayed open, and bled,  
For no one knew why they bled  
Or who was responsible. And this one  
Said to that one, and babbled:  
    "The murderer is here, he's here,            1200  
And no one can see him, no one.

This is a wonder, it is witchery.”

And such pain and sorrow afflicted

The lady that she left her senses

And shrieked like a mad wild creature: 1205

“God! God! Can't they find

The murderer, the traitor, who killed

My dear sweet lord? Good?

Oh, he was better than good!

It will be Your fault, it will, 1210

My God, if You let him escape.

I accuse no one but You

For stealing him out of our sight.

No one has ever known

Such violence, and such wrong, as You do me, 1215

Not even allowing me to see

This man, who must be so near.

And surely, seeing nothing,

I claim that some phantom, some demon,

Has placed himself between us, 1220

And I am completely bewitched.

Or he is a coward, and afraid.

What a coward he must be, to fear

My tears, a coward of cowards

Not to dare show me his face! 1225

Ah demon, cowardly creature,

Why tremble and shake at the sight

Of me? You were brave with my lord!

Cheating, empty thing,

If I only had you in my power! 1230

Let me lay my hands on you!

And how could a creature like you

Ever kill my lord, except

By treachery and tricks? My lord

Could never be beaten by you, 1235

No, not if he saw your face.

For neither God nor man

Ever knew any man like him,

And no one like him is left.

Had you been merely mortal 1240

You'd never have dared oppose him,

For there was no one like him, no one."

And so the lady struggled,

Fighting with everything, and herself,

And so she tormented and tore 1245

At herself. And they all renewed

Her grief, which couldn't have been greater,

Until the body was borne off for burial.

And after beating about, and hunting,

And shouting, her people were so tired 1250

That they'd given up, in weariness,

Finding no one they could see, no one

They could blame. And all the nuns

And priests finished their service

And left, some returning 1255

To their church, some praying

At their lord's new tomb. —But the girl

In her room had no interest in any

Of this, her thoughts were only

Of lord Yvain, and coming 1260

To him as quickly as she could

She said: "Good sir! These people

Have been hunting you in crowds. They've raised

An enormous racket in here,

Beating about in every 1265

Corner with more zeal than hounds

Barking after partridge or quail.

You must have been afraid."

"By God!" he said. "You're right!

I never expected such fear. 1270

And still, if possible, I'd like

To watch through some crack in a wall

Or some window, and see the funeral

Procession, and the corpse." And yet

|                                                  |      |
|--------------------------------------------------|------|
| He was interested neither in funeral             | 1275 |
| Nor corpse; he'd gladly have watched             |      |
| As both of them burned, if it cost him           |      |
| A thousand marks. A thousand?                    |      |
| More likely three thousand, by God!              |      |
| It was the lady of that castle he wanted         | 1280 |
| To see, it was she he spoke of.                  |      |
| And the girl put him in front of                 |      |
| A tiny window, repaying him                      |      |
| As well as she could the honor                   |      |
| He had once done her. And from                   | 1285 |
| That window my lord Yvain                        |      |
| Could watch the beautiful lady,                  |      |
| Who said: "Good sir! May God                     |      |
| Surely have mercy on your soul,                  |      |
| For never have I known of a knight               | 1290 |
| Anywhere who was your equal,                     |      |
| In anything as worthy as you!                    |      |
| Your honor, my beloved good lord,                |      |
| Was never equalled by any                        |      |
| Knight, nor your courtesy. Kindness              | 1295 |
| And openness were your friends, and courage      |      |
| And bravery rode at your side.                   |      |
| May your soul join the company                   |      |
| Of saints, my good sweet lord!"                  |      |
| Then she beat at herself, and tore               | 1300 |
| At everything her hands could reach.             |      |
| And lord Yvain suffered                          |      |
| Such pain, it was hard, no matter                |      |
| What happened, to keep from running              |      |
| To grasp her hands. But the girl                 | 1305 |
| Begged him, and counselled him, and scolded him, |      |
| Though always gracefully and in good taste,      |      |
| To keep from foolish things,                     |      |
| And she said: "You're well off right here.       |      |
| Let nothing take you away                        | 1310 |
| Until this sorrow has eased                      |      |



And all these people have gone,  
 As soon they must. Behave  
 As I urge, exactly as I  
 Urge you to do, and many 1315  
 Good things may come to you.  
 And the best thing will be to stay  
 Where you are and watch these people,  
 Inside and out, going  
 Their ways, and none of them seeing 1320  
 You, and everything for the best.  
 But guard your tongue, keep it  
 In control, for violence and passion 1322a  
 And impulse only cause trouble, 1322b  
 If you give them the chance, and I call that 1322c  
 Wicked and cowardly, not brave. 1322d  
 Be careful, if you think of being  
 A fool, to do nothing at all.  
 The wise man hides his folly 1325  
 And lets the good go to work,  
 If he can. Behave like the wise,  
 Who keep their heads out of danger—  
 They'd take no ransom for that head  
 Of yours! Be careful of yourself, 1330  
 And remember my advice! Be calm  
 And wait for my return,  
 For I dare not stay here longer.  
 If I stay on here with you  
 Perhaps they'll begin to suspect me, 1335  
 Not seeing me there with the others,  
 Milling in that crowd down there,  
 And I might be severely punished.”

So off she goes, and he stays,  
 Not knowing what he ought to do. 1340  
 He sees them about to bury  
 The corpse, and he's had no chance  
 To snatch some trophy for himself,

Something to prove beyond doubt  
 That he'd conquered and killed the man. 1345  
 Without some evidence, some proof,  
 He might be utterly disgraced.  
 For Kay is so savage, so spiteful,  
 So full of insults, so mean,  
 He could never hold him off, 1350  
 And Kay would go on, forever  
 Sniping and insulting, exactly  
 As he'd done the other day.  
 Those taunts had never left  
 His heart, still beat there, fresh, 1355  
 And yet a new love had softened  
 That rancor with its sugar and honey,  
 A love that had hunted in his heart  
 And completely conquered its prey.  
 His enemy had captured his heart, 1360  
 He loved the creature who hated  
 Him most. Not suspecting a thing,  
 The lady had avenged her lord's death.  
 She'd managed a greater vengeance  
 Than anything she could have accomplished 1365  
 By herself, without Love's assistance,  
 Who came to him so gently  
 That it struck his heart through his eyes.  
 And this is a longer-lasting  
 Wound than a sword or a spear 1370  
 Can inflict, for a sword-blow is healed  
 And well once a doctor has cared for it,  
 And the wounds of Love grow worse  
 The nearer they are to their cure.  
 And thus lord Yvain is wounded 1375  
 And can never again be cured,  
 For Love itself has conquered him.  
 Places she has always avoided  
 Are places Love sometimes seeks;  
 She longs for no lodging, no landlord, 1380

But this one, and the proof is that nothing  
 Can be bad, or too low, so long  
 As Love finds herself there.  
 Everywhere else is empty,  
 She searches so hard. How shameful                    1385  
 For Love to act this way,  
 Picking the worst of all places,  
 The lowest, the most base, as readily  
 As the best, though this time she's chosen  
 The best of all possible homes.                    1390  
 Love is most welcome, here,  
 And here she'll be, shown great honor,  
 And here she'd do well to stay.  
 And so Love should, a creature  
 Of such nobility that it seems                    1395  
 Incredible she could dare descend  
 To shameful, vulgar places.  
 Like someone who carefully spreads  
 Balm on cinders and ashes,  
 Who hates honor and cherishes                    1400  
 Shame, who mixes sugar  
 And bile, and honey and fat.  
 But this time Love was different,  
 Choosing a highborn home  
 For which no one could possibly scold her.                    1405  
     And now the dead knight was buried,  
 And the crowds of his people were gone,  
 No priests, no knights, no soldiers,  
 No ladies remained, only  
 That lady who continued to grieve.                    1410  
 She stayed alone, often  
 Clutching at her throat, wringing  
 Her hands, beating her palms,  
 Reading psalms from a prayerbook  
 Illumined in letters of gold.                    1415  
 And lord Yvain still stands  
 At the window, watching her, staring,

And the more he watches the more  
 He loves her and the more she charms him.  
 She wept and she read, but he wished           1420  
 She would give them up, and turn  
 To him, and give him leave to speak.  
 Love had caught him at the window  
 And put this desire in his heart.  
 But his desire is foolish, and he knows it:           1425  
 How could he believe, how  
 Could he trust it to happen? And he says:  
 "What a fool I am, to want  
 What I'll never have. Her lord  
 Is dead of his wounds, and can I           1430  
 Believe in peace between us?  
 By God, I understand nothing!  
 She loathes me, now, and not  
 For nothing, and not wrongly.  
 But 'now' is the crucial word,           1435  
 For a woman's mind has a thousand  
 Directions. And perhaps that 'now'  
 Will change. Oh, surely it will change,  
 And how stupid of me to stand here  
 Lost in despair. God grant           1440  
 That she changes soon! For Love  
 Has decided to put me forever  
 In her power, and Love takes what it wants!  
 Not to accept Love's wish  
 When Love comes, and Love asks, is more           1445  
 Than wicked, it is treachery. And I say,  
 And whoever worships Love  
 Let him listen, that a deserter from Love  
 Deserves no happiness. I may lose,  
 But I'll always love my enemy.           1450  
 How could I ever hate her,  
 If I wish to be loyal to Love?  
 What Love wants, I want. But she,  
 Should she accept me as a lover?

She should, for it is she I love. 1455  
 I call her my enemy: she hates me,  
 And she has reason to hate me, remembering  
 How I killed the man she loved.  
 And I, am I her enemy?  
 Never, but only her lover, 1460  
 For who have I loved like this?  
 I feel pain, seeing her beautiful  
 Hair, finer than gold,  
 And gleaming. Pain and anger  
 Fill me, when she twists and breaks 1465  
 That hair. I know nothing can dry  
 The tears falling from her eyes.  
 And all of it makes me miserable.  
 Her eyes are forever full  
 Of tears, tears without end, 1470  
 And yet no eyes were ever  
 Lovelier. I weep because  
 She weeps, but my greatest pain  
 Is seeing how she wounds her face,  
 Though it can't deserve it. I've never 1475  
 Beheld such a perfect face,  
 So glowing and intense, so vividly  
 Colored. And how it afflicts me  
 To see her clutching at her throat!  
 Surely, she cannot help 1480  
 Herself, she does the worst  
 She can. And yet no crystal,  
 No mirror, is as clear or as smooth.  
 Lord! Why is she so  
 Obsessed, why can't she hurt herself 1485  
 Less? Why wring those beautiful  
 Hands, and beat and scratch  
 At her breast? How wonderfully fine  
 To see her, in some happy mood,  
 If her beauty shines in such anger! 1490  
 Oh yes, I can swear to that:

Never before has Nature  
So outdone herself in beauty,  
For here all boundaries are exceeded.  
And how could it possibly have happened?      1495  
How could such beauty exist?  
Where could such beauty have come from?  
God must have made her Himself,  
With His own bare hands, to make Nature  
Gape. And it's all used up,      1500  
Nature could not make another,  
She'd only be wasting her time.  
God Himself, if He wanted  
To try, could not do it again,  
No matter how hard He tried,      1505  
For it could not be done, not ever."

And so my lord Yvain  
Thought of that lady, tortured  
With grief. And when will it happen  
Again that a man held      1510  
In prison as Yvain was held,  
Knowing his life in danger,  
Will love so madly that he'll never  
Beg for himself, when no one  
Else could be begging for him?      1515  
He stayed standing at the window  
Till he saw the lady leave  
And both drawbridges were lowered  
Back into place. Some other  
Knight might have been miserable,      1520  
Preferring freedom, wishing  
To remain no longer where he was,  
But to him it was all the same  
If they shut the gates or opened them.  
Indeed, if they left them open      1525  
There could be no question of leaving,  
Not even were the lady to grant him

Permission to go, gladly  
Pardoning him for the death of her lord,  
Freeing him in safety. Because 1530  
It was Love, and it was Shame, that held him,  
Standing to his right and his left.  
He was shamed if he went away,  
For no one would believe he'd done  
What he'd done, and seen what he'd seen. 1535  
And then he felt so strong  
A desire at least to see  
The lady, if nothing more,  
That prison meant nothing. He would rather  
Die than leave. —And now 1540  
The girl returned, wanting  
To keep him company, to amuse  
And entertain him, and more  
Than ready to bring him anything  
His heart desired. But love, 1545  
Seizing him, left him thoughtful,  
Distracted, languid and weak.  
And she said: "My lord Yvain!  
What sort of day have you had?"  
"The sort that pleases me immensely." 1550  
"Pleases you? By God! Are you telling  
The truth? What? How  
Can you be amused, seeing  
Them hunting and intending to kill you?"  
"Surely, good friend," he said, 1555  
"I've no interest at all in dying,  
And yet, as God is my witness,  
I've delighted in everything I've seen,  
I'm pleased and will always be pleased."  
"We can leave that subject alone," 1560  
She said, "for I see quite well  
What those words are meant to mean.  
I'm neither so simple or dull  
That I can't understand such talk.

But follow me, for I need                    1565  
 To find some quick and easy  
 Way to free you from your prison.  
 Please God, I'll have you free  
 Tonight or tomorrow. Come,  
 I'll show you the way." And he answered:                    1570  
 "One thing is certain: I'll never  
 Leave like a thief, I'll never  
 Sneak away in the dark.  
 And when all your people are gathered  
 Out in those streets, I can leave                    1575  
 With far more honor than if  
 I went by night." And after  
 These words they entered her little  
 Room. And the girl, who knew  
 What she was doing, was anxious to bring him                    1580  
 Whatever he wanted, freely  
 Supplying all he needed,  
 As she'd promised to do. And when  
 There was time, she turned in her mind  
 Exactly what he'd said, and how pleased                    1585  
 He had been with everything he saw,  
 Even as they'd hunted him in the room  
 And tried to kill him, and longed to.

And this girl stood so high in her lady's  
 Favor there was nothing she feared                    1590  
 To say, whatever her words  
 Might lead to. The lady told her  
 Everything, and she kept things to herself.  
 Then why be afraid to offer  
 Her mistress consolation, and advice                    1595  
 That would bring her honor? The first time  
 The two were alone she said:  
 "Lady! I find myself  
 Astonished at this wildness and violence.  
 My lady! Do you think this sort                    1600



Of sorrow will bring back your lord?"

"No," she answered, "but I'd rather

Be dead of my grief." "And why?"

"To go where he has gone."

"Follow him? May God protect you 1605

And find you another lord

As good, as He can do."

"You've never spoken so huge

A lie, there is no one as good."

"There are better, and if you would accept him 1610

I'd bring him here, in proof."

"Leave me! Be quiet! I will never

Find one." "My lady, you will,

If you'll only permit it. Tell me,

If you please, who will defend 1615

Your lands when King Arthur comes,

And he comes in another week,

Seeking the stone and the fountain?

Our Lady Sauvage has long since

Sent word of his coming, sent a letter 1620

With that news. Ah! How truly

She has sought to help you! What you need

To be planning is how to defend

Your fountain, and with whose help,

And all you can do is weep! 1625

My lady, dear lady, delay

No longer. I beg you! None

Of your knights is worth as much

As a single chambermaid, none of them,

And you know it, lady. The best 1630

Of your knights can barely lift

A shield or pick up a spear.

You have plenty of weak-kneed men,

But none of them have the courage

To mount a war-horse and sit tall. 1635

And the king is coming with so huge

An army that nothing will stop him."

The lady knew very well  
That this was honest advice,  
But she had her foolish side,           1640  
Like almost every woman  
Alive, totally blind  
To her madness, excusing herself  
As she pushed away what she really  
Wanted. "Leave me!" she cried,           1645  
"Not another word! And run  
For your life if you speak like this  
Again! You talk too much,  
You tire me." "Surely, my lady!  
How easy to see you're a woman,           1650  
For women grow angry when anyone  
Gives them good advice."

She left, and the lady was alone,  
And when she'd thought a bit more  
She knew she'd been very wrong.           1655  
And all her desire was to know  
How the girl could have proven  
That a better knight could be found  
Than her lord had ever been.  
And she wished she could hear her explain,           1660  
But she'd forbidden the girl to speak.  
So, longing to hear, she waited  
For the girl to return. But nothing  
She'd said had made any difference:  
The girl began at once:           1665  
"Oh, my lady! Is it fitting  
To kill yourself with grief?  
By God! Get control of yourself,  
Stop it, if only for shame.  
No highborn lady ought           1670  
To keep up her mourning so long.  
Remember your honor, think  
Of your high and noble birth.

Do you think that all the honor  
 On earth died with your lord? 1675  
 A hundred as good, or better,  
 Have been left in this world." "May the good Lord  
 Destroy me, but you lie in your teeth!  
 How could you show me a single  
 Man with a name as noble 1680  
 As my lord enjoyed all his life?"  
 "You wouldn't be grateful, if I did,  
 I know you wouldn't. You'd fly  
 In a fury, there'd be insults, there'd be threats."  
 "Not at all, I assure you I won't." 1685  
 "How good it would be, how lucky,  
 My lady, for you and your future,  
 If you let it please you—and may God  
 Give you the will to be pleased!  
 And why should I hold my tongue? 1690  
 No one listens to the likes  
 Of us. You'll think me presumptuous,  
 But I'll tell you exactly what I think.  
 When a pair of knights have come  
 Together in battle, and one 1695  
 Has beaten the other, who seems  
 To you most worthy? Me,  
 I give the prize to the victor.  
 And how does it seem to you?"  
 "I think you're trying to trick me, 1700  
 Trying to trap me with my words."  
 "Good lord! Well, you  
 Can be sure I'm right, I know  
 What I'm saying. I can prove it, too.  
 The knight who defeated your lord 1705  
 Was better than he was. He beat him,  
 And then he chased him bravely  
 Here to his home, and then  
 He locked him up in his house."  
 "Oh now," she answered, "I hear 1710

The worst nonsense in the world.  
Enough! You've a wicked heart.  
Enough! You're a stupid, tiresome  
Girl. Enough of your silliness!  
Never come in my presence           1715  
With praise for that man. Enough!"  
"Indeed, my lady! As I told you,  
I knew you'd be ungrateful.  
I told you I knew. But you gave me  
Your word, you promised, that if           1720  
I spoke you'd listen and not  
Be angry. You haven't kept  
Your promise, you gave me your word  
And you broke it. I spoke because  
You wished it, you asked me to speak,           1725  
But you're angry, and I've lost by my words."

And then she returned to the room  
Where she kept my lord Yvain  
Resting and waiting in great comfort,  
But nothing pleased him, when he heard           1730  
He could not see the lady,  
And though she repeated her quarrel  
With her mistress, he paid no attention.  
And the lady, too, lay awake  
All night, at war with herself,           1735  
Terribly worried how  
To protect her wonderful spring,  
And beginning to regret how she'd scolded  
And insulted her servant, and shown her  
Such violent contempt, for she was sure,           1740  
Completely certain, that it was not  
For a bribe or any reward,  
Nor because she loved him, that the girl  
Had begun to speak of her husband's  
Killer; she knew she loved her           1745  
Better than him, and her advice

Intended no shame and no harm:  
The girl was too loyal a friend.  
And like that! the lady suddenly  
Changed toward the girl she'd abused,           1750  
Worried, now, that she'd never  
Ever love her again.  
And he whom she'd pushed away  
She calmly excused, convinced  
By reason and by argument that nothing           1755  
He'd done had injured her.  
And so she debated with herself,  
As if he were standing in front of her.  
And these were the words of her argument:  
"Now," she said, "could you possibly           1760  
Deny that you killed my lord?"  
"That," he replied, "I could never  
Say. I admit it." "Then tell me,  
Did you do it because you hate me,  
To hurt me, to make me miserable?"           1765  
"May death take me here  
And now if I ever meant you  
Harm." "Then you've done me no wrong,  
And you've done no wrong to him:  
He'd have killed you, if he could.           1770  
And thus it seems to me  
I've judged correctly, and well."  
And so, by this same proof,  
She found reason and right and wisdom,  
And no need for her to hate him,           1775  
Ensuring herself what she wanted  
And all the time igniting  
Herself, like smoking wood,  
Bursting into flame when it's stirred,  
Smouldering if no one blows it           1780  
Awake. If the girl had come to her  
Now, she'd have won the argument  
She'd tried so hard to win

And been so insulted for beginning.  
 And in the morning she came 1785  
 And began it all over again,  
 Starting where she'd stopped before.  
 And it made the lady lower  
 Her head, for she knew she'd done wrong  
 To be angry and insult her as she'd done. 1790  
 And now she wanted to make  
 Amends, and asked the knight's name,  
 And his birth, and what he was like,  
 And wisely humbling herself.  
 And she said: "I beg your pardon 1795  
 For my offensive words, and my swollen  
 Pride, speaking to you  
 Like a fool. I will follow your advice.  
 But tell me, if you know, what sort  
 Of man is this knight of whom 1800  
 You've told me so much, arguing  
 His cause, and what was his birth?  
 And if he's worthy of me,  
 And he wishes to do it, I'll marry him,  
 I promise you, I'll make him lord 1805  
 Of my lands and of me. But he'll have  
 To manage it all so there'll be  
 No gossip, so no one will say,  
 'Ah, that's the one, the woman  
 Who married her husband's murderer'." 1810  
 "In the name of God, my lady,  
 So let it be. Your lord  
 Will be the noblest, most honorable,  
 The handsomest of Abel's lineage."  
 "And his name?" "My lord Yvain." 1815  
 "Indeed! Not badly born  
 At all, but of great good birth,  
 I know—the son of King Urien."  
 "Exactly, my lady! You're right."  
 "And when are we to see him?" 1820

“In five days' time.” “Too long.  
I wish he were already here.  
Let him come tonight, or at least  
Tomorrow.” “My lady! No one  
Could come so far in one day.           1825  
But I'll send one of my servant  
Boys, who can run very fast,  
And I think he can get to King Arthur's  
Court by tomorrow night,  
At least. And Arthur's court           1830  
Is where we must seek him.” “That's more  
Than long enough. Those  
Will be long, long days. But tell him  
He must be back tomorrow  
Night, and be faster than usual.           1835  
Tell him, if he does his best,  
He can turn two days into one.  
And tonight there'll be a moon,  
So he can turn the night into day.  
And tell him once he comes back           1840  
I'll give him whatever he wants.”  
“Let all these problems be mine:  
I'll have him here in your hands  
In three days at the latest.  
And meanwhile send for your soldiers,           1845  
To ask their advice about  
The king, who's surely coming.  
To keep up the custom of defending  
Your spring, you need to consult  
With them, to seek their counsel.           1850  
But none of them are likely  
To boast about coming. Or come.  
And then you'll be able to say  
With justice that you had to marry.  
A famous knight begs           1855  
For your hand, but you dare not accept him  
If a single objection is heard.

And I'll tell you exactly their answer:  
 I know they're all so worthless  
 That to get the burden on someone           1860  
 Else's back, not theirs,  
 They'll all be falling at your feet  
 And thanking you over and over  
 For getting them out of their trouble.  
 Whoever's afraid of his shadow           1865  
 Will gladly avoid, if he can,  
 Any meeting with a spear or a javelin.  
 Cowards don't like those games."  
 And the lady answered: "By God,  
 I'll do it, I give you my word!           1870  
 And besides, I'd already thought  
 Of exactly the plan you describe,  
 And that's exactly what we'll do.  
 But why are you waiting here?  
 Go! Don't waste a minute,           1875  
 Arrange what you have to arrange.  
 And I shall stay with my people."  
 And so they ended their talk.  
 And the girl pretended to hunt  
 For my lord Yvain in his own           1880  
 Country, while every day  
 She saw to his bath and his grooming.  
 And more: she had him dressed  
 In fine red wool, lined  
 With gleaming new fur. She leaves out           1885  
 Nothing he needs to properly  
 Adorn himself, she lends him  
 Everything: a golden necklace,  
 Set with precious stones,  
 The sort that make men graceful,           1890  
 And a belt, and a purse to hang from it,  
 Woven of gold brocade.  
 And so she dressed him perfectly,  
 And assured her mistress that the servants



She'd sent had all returned, 1895  
And all had served them well.  
"What?" she demanded. "Is he here,  
My lord Yvain?" "He is."  
"He's here? Then let him come to me,  
In secret and without any noise, 1900  
While no one is here in my room.  
Be sure that no one else  
Gets in, for I'd hate to have  
A fourth." So the girl left her,  
And went where her guest was waiting, 1905  
Never showing in her face  
The happiness she felt in her heart.  
And she told him the lady knew everything,  
And how she had hidden him away,  
And she said: "My lord Yvain! 1910  
By God, there's nothing left  
To hide. It's all come out,  
My lady knows it all,  
Who's furious with me, and hates me,  
And can't stop her scolding and reproaching. 1915  
But this much assurance she's given me:  
I can bring you to her and no one  
Will stop us, and no one will harm you.  
This shouldn't displease you, I think,  
Except—and I'll tell you no lies, 1920  
For that would be disloyal—  
She wants you to be her prisoner,  
She wishes to have your body  
For herself, not even your heart  
To be free." "Surely," he answered, 1925  
"I agree, I've no objections.  
I want to be her prisoner."  
"And so you'll be, by this hand  
I lay on your shoulder! Now come  
And do as I say, behave 1930  
So humbly when you're in her presence

That your jailing won't be too bad.  
And don't be too concerned!  
I suspect your confinement won't be  
A burden, or bother you much.” 1935  
And so she led him off,  
Worrying him a bit, then making him  
Calmer, and giving him hints  
Of the prison he was going into.  
What lover escapes his prison? 1940  
She was right, calling it a prison:  
Whoever's in love is in jail.

And so she led my lord  
Yvain by the hand, and took him  
There where he'd be dearly cherished, 1945  
But believing he'd never be welcomed.  
No wonder he believed every word.  
And they found the lady seated  
On a soft red cushion. And I promise  
You this: my lord Yvain 1950  
Was mightily afraid, entering  
That room, and finding the lady,  
Who spoke not a single word.  
And that made him more afraid,  
Half overcome with fear 1955  
And believing himself betrayed.  
And he stood there so long, motionless,  
That finally the girl spoke up,  
Saying: “A thousand curses  
On her head, who brings a knight 1960  
To a beautiful lady's room,  
And he won't go near her, or speak,  
Too stupid to tell her his name.”  
And then she took him by the arm  
And told him: “Come here, knight! 1965  
And don't be afraid of my lady,  
She's not about to kill you.

Try to appease her, make peace.  
I'll join you. Pray for her pardon  
For killing Esclados the Red, 1970  
The knight who was her husband.”

And lord Yvain clasped  
His hands, and fell to his knees,  
And spoke like a true lover:  
“Lady! Rather than beg 1975  
For your mercy I'll thank you for anything  
You wish to do with me.  
Nothing you do could displease me.”

“Really? And what if I kill you?”  
“Lady! Your will be done. 1980  
You'll never hear me complain.”  
“I've never heard such a thing,”  
She said, “that you put yourself  
Completely in my power, and no one  
Compels you.” “Lady! Truly, 1985

No power on earth could be  
As strong as this which orders  
Me to consent to your will,  
Completely and in every regard.  
Nothing could make me hesitate 1990  
To do whatever you wish.  
And if I could atone  
For that death, in which I did nothing  
Wrong, I'd do it at once.”

“What?” she said, “Now tell me 1995  
If you ought to be forgiven,  
If you truly did no wrong  
When you killed my own true lord?”

“Lady!” he answered, “pardon me,  
When your lord attacked me, and he did, 2000  
Why was I wrong to defend  
Myself? When you kill a man  
And defend yourself against death,  
Tell me what harm has been done?”

"None, if you look at it right. 2005

And it seems to me that nothing  
Would be gained by having you killed.  
But tell me, I'd like to know,

From where you gather this strength  
That orders you to consent, 2010

Without contradiction, to whatever  
I wish. I grant you your pardon.

Come, be seated, and tell me  
How you come to be vanquished."

"Lady! That power comes 2015

From my heart, which bends toward you.  
My desire comes from my heart."

"Sweet friend, what drove your heart?"

"Oh lady, my eyes!" "And your eyes?"

"The beauty I see in you." 2020

"But what has beauty done wrong?"

"Lady! It has made me love."

"Love? And whom?" "You,  
Dear lady." "Me?" "Indeed."

"Really? And how?" "So nothing 2025

Could be greater, so my heart wishes  
To be near you and can only be found  
With you, so I think of nothing  
Else, so I surrender completely

To you, so I love you more 2030

Than myself, so I'm ready to live  
Or die, exactly as you choose."

"And would you dare to defend  
My spring, defend it for me?"

"Oh lady, against the world!" 2035

"Then know: we have come together."

They'd agreed, and it didn't take long!  
And the lady, who had already spoken  
To her barons and all her men,

Said: "From here we shall go 2040

To the hall where my soldiers are gathered,

Who all have advised and counselled  
That because of the need we all see  
I ought to marry again.  
And because of that need I will.           2045  
I give myself to you.  
I cannot refuse so good  
A knight, the son of a king.”

And so the girl has done  
Everything she wanted to do.           2050  
And lord Yvain was more  
The master than words could describe.  
And then the lady led him  
To that hall, full of her knights  
And all her men at arms.           2055  
And my lord Yvain was so handsome  
That they stared at him in wonder,  
And rose to their feet as one,  
And greeted him, and bowed  
To their lord Yvain, and thought:           2060  
“This is the man she'll take.

May anyone who stands in his way  
Be cursed! He seems a marvellous  
Brave knight. The empress of Rome  
Would be happy, married to him.           2065  
How good it would be if they were promised,  
Pledged by their own hands  
To be married today or tomorrow!”  
And all of them thought the same.  
At the head of that hall was a bench           2070  
And the lady seated herself there,  
Where everyone would be able to see her.  
And my lord Yvain began  
To seat himself at her feet,  
But the lady raised him up           2075  
And ordered her steward to speak,  
And lift his voice so everyone

There might hear him. And the steward  
Began to speak, an obedient  
Man with a swift clear tongue: 2080  
“My lords!” he said. “We’ve a war  
To face. Each day the king  
Is preparing, as fast as he can,  
To come and lay waste our lands.  
Before another two weeks 2085  
It will all have been done, we’ll be ruined,  
If we haven’t some brave defender.  
When my lady was married, almost  
Seven full years ago,  
She did it by your advice. 2090  
Now her lord is dead, which hurts her.  
All he has is six feet  
Of earth, who owned this whole land  
And graced it exceedingly well.  
What a shame he was here so short 2095  
A time. But a woman can’t carry  
A shield, she can’t use a spear.  
Better for her, much better,  
To marry some worthy knight.  
And the need was never greater! 2100  
Advise her, all of you, to take  
A husband, so the customs of this castle  
And this town, in force for more  
Than sixty years, can go on.”  
As these words were spoken they all 2105  
Declared it was just what they wanted,  
And they threw themselves at her feet.  
Her own desire was strengthened,  
But she let them beg her to do  
As she wished, speaking as if 2110  
Against her will, but saying  
What she’d say if they’d all opposed her.  
So she said: “My lords! Since you wish it,  
This knight, who sits beside me,

Has begged me to have him. He wants me. 2115  
 And he wishes to place himself  
 At my service, to protect my honor,  
 And I thank him, as you do also.  
 To be sure, I've not met him before,  
 But I've heard him spoken of, and often, 2120  
 For he's as noble a man as you'll find,  
 Believe me, and King Urien's son.  
 And more: his birth is noble,  
 But he's just as brave as well born,  
 And blessed with such sense and such chivalry 2125  
 That no one should block this marriage.  
 All of you, I think, have heard  
 Of my lord Yvain, and this  
 Is he who wishes my hand.  
 I don't deserve so noble 2130  
 A husband, but I'll have him, and soon."  
 And all of them said: "Be wise,  
 Don't let another day pass  
 Without making this marriage. How foolish  
 To let a single hour 2135  
 Go by without doing anything  
 So worthy." And they begged her to do  
 Exactly what she wanted to do,  
 For Love urged her on,  
 Though she asked their counsel and advice; 2140  
 But there's greater honor in taking him  
 When all of her people advise it.  
 And nothing they ask displeases her,  
 But stirs her up and impels her  
 To let her heart have its way. 2145  
 A horse half in a gallop  
 Goes faster, when it feels the spurs.  
 And with all her barons watching  
 She gave herself to Yvain.  
 And he took Laudine de Landuc, 2150  
 Daughter of Duke Laudunet,

A lord of whom songs are sung,  
From the hand of her household priest.  
That very same day he married her,  
Not waiting a moment to celebrate.        2155  
There were plenty of mitres and crosses,  
For the lady had summoned all  
Her bishops and her abbots. And everyone  
There was happy, and many  
Were there, and wealth was everywhere,        2160  
More than I know how to tell you,  
Though I thought on it long and hard.  
Better to be silent than speak badly.

And now my lord Yvain  
Was master, and the dead man forgotten,        2165  
And the man who killed him married  
To his wife, and sharing her bed,  
And his people happier with their living  
Lord than they were with the dead one.  
They served him well at his wedding,        2170  
Which lasted till the evening before  
King Arthur came to see  
The wonders of the spring and the stone,  
And all his companions with him,  
And everyone of all his household,        2175  
All gone on this expedition,  
No one left behind.

And then my lord Kay spoke up:  
“Oh ho! Now what’s become  
Of Yvain, why isn’t he here,        2180  
Who boasted—after his dinner—  
That he meant to avenge his cousin?  
Oh well, he spoke after wine.  
I suppose he’s run away.  
He’ll never come back and face us.        2185  
That’s what comes of such pride.  
You have to be brave, daring



To boast of something no one  
 Would praise, and no one can vouch for,  
 Except some fawning liar.           2190  
 Cowards and brave men are different:  
 A coward sitting near a fire  
 Puffs out some pretty grand words,  
 He says the rest of us are fools,  
 And he thinks that no one knows better.           2195  
 But a hero would squirm in agony  
 If someone told stories of the things  
 He'd done, though he'd really done them.  
 But how could the coward really  
 Be wrong to praise himself,           2200  
 And boast of his strength and his courage?  
 For who would do it for him?  
 If he doesn't boast his boasts,  
 Who would? Even the heralds  
 Ignore him, proclaiming true heroes           2205  
 And brushing cowards aside."  
 And after Sir Kay had spoken,  
 My lord Gawain answered him:  
 "Mercy, lord Kay, mercy!  
 Yvain may not be here,           2210  
 But who knows what keeps him away?  
 And truly, he's never stooped  
 To speaking evil or insulting  
 You. He's always been courteous."  
 "My lord!" said Kay. "I'll be quiet.           2215  
 I'll say nothing more, today,  
 Since I see I've already offended."  
 And the king, wanting to see  
 That rain, spilled a whole bowl  
 Of water on the magic stone,           2220  
 And immediately it began to pour.  
 Nor was it much longer before  
 My lord Yvain hurried  
 To the forest, fully armed,

Riding faster than a gallop                    2225  
On a huge, sleek horse, sturdy  
And strong and exceedingly fast.  
And Kay, seeing him, determined  
That he'd ask for the battle to be his—  
For however it might end, he always                    2230  
Wished to begin the fighting:  
If he couldn't be the first to swing  
A sword, he'd fly in a rage.  
Before anyone else could speak  
He begged that the battle might be his.                    2235  
“Kay!” said the king, “since you want it,  
And asked before anyone else,  
You shouldn't be refused.” Kay thanked him,  
Then mounted his horse. And my lord  
Yvain was more than happy                    2240  
To bring him a bit of disgrace,  
If he could, for he recognized Kay  
At once, from his weapons and armor.  
Holding their shields by the straps  
They rushed at one another,                    2245  
Spurring their horses, their spears  
Lowered, held firm in their hands  
And thrust a little forward.  
Holding the leather-covered  
Handles they could strike so hard,                    2250  
When they came together, that both  
Spears shattered, splintered  
From the tip right up to their hands.  
And my lord Yvain struck him  
So hard that Kay was swept                    2255  
From his saddle, somersaulting to the ground,  
Which he hit helmet first.  
Not wishing to do him more harm,  
My lord Yvain quickly  
Dismounted and caught up his horse.                    2260  
And the sight was pleasant to so many

Of the king's knights that they said:  
"Ah ha! Now you're lying on the ground,  
You who've insulted so many!  
And still, it's only right                    2265  
To pardon you, at least this time,  
For it's never happened before."  
Meanwhile my lord Yvain  
Approached Arthur, leading  
The horse by the bridle, intending                    2270  
To surrender it to the king. And he said:  
"My lord! I hand you this horse,  
For it would be wrong of me  
To keep anything of yours."  
"And who are you?" asked the king.                    2275  
"I'd never know, unless  
I heard your name or saw you  
Without your armor." And then  
My lord Yvain told him  
His name, and Kay was overwhelmed                    2280  
With shame, crushed, crestfallen,  
That he'd called Yvain a coward.  
But the others were delighted, deeply  
Pleased by the honor Yvain  
Had won. And even the king                    2285  
Was pleased, and my lord Gawain  
Was a hundred times happier than anyone  
Else, for he cherished that friendship  
More than that of any  
Knight he knew. And the king                    2290  
Asked Yvain to please  
Tell them, if he would, just how  
This adventure had come about,  
For he found himself immensely  
Curious to understand it all.                    2295  
So he urged Yvain to speak.  
And Yvain told them everything,  
All the good will and the help

The girl had given him, steering  
His way through the entire story,           2300  
Forgetting nothing. And then  
He invited the king, and with him  
All his knights, to come  
To stay at his home. They would do him  
Great honor, and bring him much joy,           2305  
If they'd agree to be his guests.  
And the king said he'd gladly  
Come for an entire week,  
To honor him, and please him, and share  
His company. And Yvain thanked him,           2310  
And they stayed where they were no longer.  
Mounting their horses, they took  
The shortest road to his castle.  
And my lord Yvain sent  
A squire to go before them,           2315  
Carrying a hunting falcon,  
So his lady might not be surprised  
And all their people might make  
Their houses beautiful, for the king's  
Coming. And the lady, when she heard,           2320  
Was delighted that the king was coming.  
And no one who heard the news  
Was anything less than pleased.  
And the lady sent for them all  
And asked them to go and meet him,           2325  
And they neither quarreled nor grumbled,  
But set out cheerfully, all of them  
Anxious to do as she wished.

Riding their huge Spanish horses  
They went to meet the British           2330  
King, greeting with great courtesy  
Royal Arthur and then  
Everyone who travelled with him.  
“Welcome,” they cried, “to this party,

Brave knights all! Blessed                    2335  
 Be he who leads you here  
 And gives us so many good guests!"  
 The town rang with happiness  
 Because of the king's coming.  
 They brought out their silken sheets                    2340  
 And hung them in front of their houses,  
 And put out tapestries to walk on,  
 And hung them along the streets,  
 All for the king, as they waited.  
 And they readied something else:                    2345  
 Canopies across their streets  
 To keep off the heat of the sun.  
 Church bells rang, horns blew,  
 And trumpets, making so much noise  
 That God's own thunder could never                    2350  
 Have been heard. Girls danced for him,  
 And flutes and pipes played,  
 And tambourines, and cymbals, and drums.  
 And elsewhere, nimble young men  
 Did their part, dancing and leaping—                    2355  
 Happiness ruling them all.  
 And with this sort of celebration  
 They gave the king a fitting  
 Welcome. And out came their lady,  
 Wearing a queenly gown,                    2360  
 A dress of brand new ermine,  
 And on her head a crown  
 Rich with red rubies, and nowhere  
 On her face could one see concern,  
 But so much happiness and laughter                    2365  
 That she seems to me to be lovelier  
 Than any immortal goddess.  
 And her people crowded around her,  
 And each and all of them cried:  
 "Welcome to the king, the master                    2370  
 Of all worldly lords and kings!"

The king had barely begun  
 To answer when he saw the lady  
 Coming to hold his bridle.  
 And thinking he would not wait,                    2375  
 As soon as he saw her approaching  
 He quickly dismounted from his horse.  
 And the lady greeted him, and said:  
 "A hundred thousand welcomes  
 To my lord the king, and blessings                    2380  
 On his nephew, my lord Gawain."  
 "And to you," answered the king,  
 "Lovely creature, I wish  
 Great joy and great good luck!"  
 Then the king hugged her to him,                    2385  
 Nobly and with spirit, and the lady  
 Threw her arms around him.  
 But how she welcomed them all  
 Is hardly worth telling: no one  
 Has ever heard of guests                    2390  
 Granted such a welcome,  
 With such honor and so much attention.  
 I could describe a good deal of happiness,  
 But why waste words? I shall only  
 Mention a friendship struck,                    2395  
 Entirely in private, no one  
 To see or to hear, between  
 The moon and the sun. And who  
 Do you think I mean to refer to?  
 He who was lord of all knights                    2400  
 More famous than any, should certainly  
 Be called the sun. I speak,  
 Of course, of my lord Gawain,  
 Who shed his lustre on the world  
 Of chivalry exactly as the sun                    2405  
 Rising in the morning opens  
 His rays and breathes his famous  
 Warmth everywhere he's seen.

And she I have called the moon  
 Could be called nothing else, because 2410  
 Of her lofty wisdom, and her courtesy.  
 And nevertheless that's not  
 The only reason for calling her  
 Moon, for her name was Lunette.

The girl's name was Lunette, 2415  
Gracious, brunette, exceedingly  
Wise and knowing and quick.  
The better Gawain knew her  
The better he thought of her, and loved her,  
And declared her his friend, she 2420  
Who had saved his comrade and friend  
From certain death, and he gave her  
A pledge of service and support.  
And she told him how hard it had been  
To get around her mistress, 2425  
To bring her to marrying my lord  
Yvain, and how she had sheltered  
Yvain from the hands of those  
Who would have killed him. He'd been  
Right there, but they couldn't see him. 2430  
And Gawain laughed with delight  
At her story, and said: "My dear  
Young lady, I hereby give you  
Whatever sort of knight  
I may be, for whatever use 2435  
I may be. Don't exchange me for anyone  
Else you think may be better.  
I am yours—and you shall be mine,  
Now and forever." "I thank you,  
Kind sir!" she agreed. 2440

2420

2430

2435

2440

And while

In attendance, each of them beautiful,  
And gracious, and well-bred, and clever,                    2445  
And wise, and all well-born.  
It was easy to find entertainment,  
Hugging and kissing and talking  
And simply watching, and sitting  
Beside them at night. That much                    2450  
Was easy, and that much they had.  
And Yvain was immensely happy,  
Having the king as his guest.  
And the lady so honored everyone,  
Separately and all together,                    2455  
That fools might have thought it was love  
Drawing her on, and love  
She offered them all. They're simple  
Idiots, and deserve the name,  
Thinking a lady is in love                    2460  
Because she is gracious and polite  
To some blockhead, and makes him happy,  
And hugs him. It's fools who are happy  
With pretty words. There's nothing  
Difficult about fooling a fool.                    2465

A week went by, spent  
In pleasure and delight. The woods  
And the river opened their arms  
To anyone who wanted to enjoy them.  
And those who wished to see                    2470  
The lands my lord Yvain  
Had conquered, that came with the lady  
He'd won, could easily amuse  
Themselves at one of the neighboring  
Castles, a mile or two off.                    2475  
And the king, when he'd made his visit  
And wished to stay no longer,  
Got ready to say his farewells.  
But his courtiers had spent the week



Determined, if they could, to take 2480  
 My lord Yvain home  
 With them. They'd begged and argued  
 And worked as hard as they could.  
 "What?" said Gawain. "There are men  
 Who aren't the men they were 2485  
 Once they're married. Not you!  
 By Mary, Mother of Heaven,  
 The devil with anyone who marries  
 And goes slack! A beautiful lady  
 Should make us better, as friend 2490  
 Or as wife. No one should be loved  
 Who isn't worth it. And you,  
 Surely you'll regret her love  
 If it makes you worthless. For a woman  
 Can just as easily fall out 2495  
 Of love—and there's nothing wrong  
 In hating anyone who turns worthless  
 As soon as he's lord of the realm.  
 It's now that you need to prove  
 Yourself! Take the bit in your teeth: 2500  
 We ought to go jousting, you  
 And I, so no one can call you  
 Jealous. You shouldn't be lazy,  
 But throw yourself into tournaments,  
 Take on the world, and with pleasure, 2505  
 Whatever it costs you! Lying  
 Around will change you for the worse.  
 Now really, you've got to come,  
 For I'll come with you. Be careful,  
 My friend, that we don't fall out, 2510  
 And cease to be comrades! It won't  
 Be any fault of mine.  
 I'm here. How strange to fall  
 In love with endless ease.  
 Things grow sweeter when you're forced 2515  
 To delay them, and a little thing

That we're obliged to wait for is better  
Than some great thing that we always have.  
The pleasures of love, when they come to us  
Late, are like fire in a green            2520  
Log, burning hotter and longer  
And keeping their heat better  
For taking so long to light.  
Habits can grow on us,  
Can get hard to give up. We can want to            2525  
And find that we can't. And surely,  
My comrade, my friend, I have  
No lover like yours, so beautiful,  
So good. By God and all  
The saints in heaven, if I had her            2530  
You couldn't pry me away!  
I'd be her fool and her slave.  
I know: a man can give  
Advice he couldn't follow  
Himself, just like the preachers,            2535  
All of them lying swindlers,  
But teaching what's right, and speaking it,  
Though they never do it themselves."

And Gawain said so much  
And so urgently, and begged him so hard,            2540  
That Yvain agreed, but said  
He needed to speak to his wife,  
To see if she minded his going,  
For whether it was wise or foolish  
He'd never leave her and return            2545  
To Britain without her consent.  
So he took his wife aside  
(Who had no way of knowing  
What he wanted) and said: "Dear lady!  
My very heart and soul,            2550  
My treasure, my joy, and my happiness,  
For your honor, and also for mine,

Promise me something!" And the lady  
 Immediately agreed, not knowing  
 What he meant to ask, and she said:                   2555  
 "Sweet sir! I am yours to command,  
 Whatever the favor may be."  
 And so my lord Yvain  
 Asked her to permit him to escort  
 Arthur home, and then                   2560  
 Go tourneying, so no one could call him  
 A coward. And she said: "I agree—  
 But only till a day we shall fix.  
 My love will turn to hate,  
 Believe me—for it's true, and it's certain—                   2565  
 If you stay too long and stay past  
 The day I shall tell you. And this  
 Is the truth: I'll tell you no lies.  
 You can break your word. I'll keep mine.  
 If you wish to have my love,                   2570  
 And if you think well of me,  
 Make up your mind to be back  
 At the very latest a year  
 And a week from the feast of Saint John,  
 For this is the eighth day since that feast.                   2575  
 If you're not here with me  
 On precisely that day you'll have lost  
 My love, like a checkmated king."  
 My lord Yvain wept  
 And sighed and found it hard to say,                   2580  
 "Lady! It's a long way off.  
 If I were a dove I could come  
 And be with you as often as I liked,  
 And as much as I liked. And I pray  
 To God, if it pleases Him,                   2585  
 Not to keep me too long  
 Away from you. Sometimes a man  
 Means to hurry, but can't know  
 The future. Who knows what will happen?

I may become ill. I may                    2590  
 Be held prisoner. Events may detain me.  
 I think you're wrong, and unjust,  
 Not to exclude at least  
 Physical impossibility."  
 "Sir!" she said, "I'll grant that.                    2595  
 And still, I swear to you, if our Lord  
 Keeps you from death, nothing  
 Will stand in your way as long  
 As you never forget me. Here:  
 Put on your finger this ring                    2600  
 Of mine. I loan it to you.  
 And let me tell you exactly  
 What sort of stone it is.  
 No true and loyal lover  
 Can be captured, or lose any blood,                    2605  
 Nor have any evil come to him,  
 As long as he wears it and holds it  
 Dear and remembers his beloved.  
 He turns as hard as iron.  
 It serves him as shield and armor.                    2610  
 No knight has ever had it  
 From my hand. I give it to you  
 Only because of my love."  
 And now Yvain had his freedom,  
 But wept at the thought of taking it.—                    2615  
 But the king would not wait for anything,  
 No matter what anyone said.  
 Indeed, he grew impatient  
 To have the horses led in,  
 Bridled and ready to leave.                    2620  
 And whatever he wanted was what everyone  
 Did: the horses were led in,  
 And all that was left was to mount them.  
 Should I really tell you how my lord  
 Yvain said his farewells,                    2625  
 And the kisses he took, and the kisses

He gave, sprinkled with tears  
And scented with sweetness? Should I tell you  
About the king, how the lady  
Herself escorted him, her maids                    2630  
In waiting with her, and all  
Her ladies, and all her knights?  
It would take too long to tell.  
When he saw how the lady wept,  
The king begged her to come                    2635  
No further, but go back to her home.  
He urged her so seriously, and so hard,  
That she and her people turned back.

How hard it was for my lord  
Yvain to leave his wife!                    2640  
He rode off without his heart.  
His body might follow the king,  
But his heart could not be led.  
She who held it, joined  
To her own, was she who stayed home,                    2645  
And nothing could pry it loose.  
No body without a heart  
Can possibly live long. No one  
Has ever seen such a marvel  
As a living body with no heart.                    2650  
And yet this wonder came true:  
The body kept its life  
But kept it without its heart,  
Which would not go with its body.  
The heart had a good place to stay in,                    2655  
And the body lived on, hoping  
Its heart would return, and making  
A strange sort of heart out of hope,  
Though hope is so often a traitor,  
A breaker of promises. And Yvain                    2660  
Will never know in advance  
Just when hope will betray him,

For all he needs to do  
 Is stay a day later  
 Than agreed on, and his wife will be hard                      2665  
 To talk into peace and a truce.  
 And I think he will stay too late:  
 For Gawain won't let him go,  
 Once the two of them have begun  
 To travel about, fighting                      2670  
 Wherever tournaments can be found.  
 And indeed, as the year went by,  
 Yvain had such success  
 Everywhere he went, that Gawain  
 Was determined to honor him, and made him                      2675  
 Linger so long that a year  
 Had gone, and enough of the next one  
 With it, and Assumption had arrived,  
 And the month of August, and the king  
 Was holding his court at Chester,                      2680  
 And the evening before they'd come  
 From a tournament where my lord Yvain  
 Had entered and fought and taken  
 All the prizes. And the story  
 Told of those times tells                      2685  
 That lord Yvain and his comrade  
 Were unwilling to take lodgings in town,  
 But had their tents pitched  
 Outside the city, and held court—  
 For they never attended the king's                      2690  
 Court. The king came to theirs,  
 For their knights were better and far  
 More numerous than his. And Arthur  
 Was seated among them when all  
 Of a sudden Yvain was struck                      2695  
 By an overwhelming thought,  
 A thought that surprised him more  
 Than anything he'd thought of since leaving  
 His wife. He realized all

|                                            |      |
|--------------------------------------------|------|
| At once that he'd broken his promise       | 2700 |
| And stayed beyond the time                 |      |
| They'd agreed. He could barely keep        |      |
| From crying, but shame held back           |      |
| His tears. And while deep in thought       |      |
| He saw a girl approaching him,             | 2705 |
| Mounted on a black horse                   |      |
| With spotted white feet, and riding        |      |
| Swiftly. She dismounted at the tent,       |      |
| But no one helped her, and no one          |      |
| Came forward to take her horse.            | 2710 |
| And as soon as she was able to locate      |      |
| The king, she dropped the cloak            |      |
| From her shoulders, and let it fall,       |      |
| And came into the tent, and straight       |      |
| To the king, and stood in front of him,    | 2715 |
| And said that her mistress sent greetings  |      |
| To Arthur, and also to Gawain,             |      |
| And to everyone except Yvain,              |      |
| For he was disloyal, and a traitor,        |      |
| And a liar, and a deceiver, who'd deserted | 2720 |
| His wife and betrayed her. "She knows      |      |
| How little his lying is worth,             |      |
| Pretending to be a faithful                |      |
| Lover, but truly a treacherous             |      |
| Thief. And he's cheated my mistress,       | 2725 |
| Who'd expected nothing but good,           |      |
| And never believed he'd come               |      |
| Only to steal her heart. For those         |      |
| Who truly love are not thieves.            |      |
| And yet there are men, and we call         | 2730 |
| Them thieves, who cheat at love,           |      |
| But really know nothing about it.          |      |
| A lover takes his beloved's                |      |
| Heart, but he never steals it,             |      |
| He watches it, he keeps it safe            | 2735 |
| From thieves, who pretend to be honest.    |      |

But these hypocritical thieves  
And traitors always struggle  
To steal hearts that are worthless to them.  
A lover, wherever he goes,           2740  
Cherishes that heart, and returns it.  
But Yvain has killed my mistress:  
She thought he would care for her heart,  
And bring it back to her, before  
A year had gone by. Yvain!           2745  
You've forgotten it all, you couldn't  
Be bothered to remember a thing.  
You were pledged to return to my mistress  
In exactly a year. She gave you,  
And graciously, all the time           2750  
Till the feast of Saint John, and you,  
You've shown her such contempt  
That you've never thought of her at all.  
There in her room my mistress  
Counted every day,           2755  
For lovers live in anxiety,  
And they're never able to sleep,  
But every night they add up  
The days, as they come and go.  
Do you know how it is with lovers?           2760  
They watch the days and the seasons.  
She accuses you neither with no reason  
Nor too soon, though nothing I say  
Is meant for some judge's ears.  
The only thing I say           2765  
Is that she who married you to my mistress  
Has betrayed her. Yvain! My mistress  
Disowns you. She sends me to tell you  
Never to come back, but only  
Return her ring. I           2770  
Who stand here before you will carry it  
Back to her. Surrender it now!  
You're pledged to give it back."



And Yvain could not speak, could not answer,  
 Deprived of his senses and his tongue. 2775  
 But the girl came forward, and pulled  
 The ring from his finger, and then  
 Commended the king to God,  
 And all the others, except him  
 Whom she left in deep distress.— 2780  
 And his sorrow grew all the time,  
 Making him suffer from everything  
 He heard and everything he saw.  
 He wished he'd been sent away  
 To some savage land, all alone, 2785  
 Where no one would know him, or find him,  
 And neither man nor woman  
 Would know anything more about him  
 Than if he'd fallen in some abyss.  
 There was nothing he hated as much 2790  
 As himself, and no one to comfort him  
 In the death he'd chosen for himself.  
 And still he would choose to go mad  
 Rather than not take revenge  
 On himself, for taking away 2795  
 His happiness. He withdrew from his fellow  
 Knights, and feared for his sanity.  
 And they ignored him, left him  
 Entirely alone, as he chose.  
 And they knew how little he cared 2800  
 For their doings, and their words, and for them.  
 And then he wandered far  
 From all the pavilions and tents.  
 And such a storm broke  
 In his skull that he lost his senses, 2805  
 And he tore at his skin and his clothes,  
 And crossed meadows and fields, and left  
 His squires and his men so uncertain  
 That they had no idea where he was.  
 And they hunted everywhere, seeking him 2810

Wherever there were knights living,  
 And in hedgerows, and in orchards, but nowhere  
 They looked was where he was.  
 Running, and running, he'd gone  
 Until near an enclosure he found           2815  
 A boy carrying a bow  
 And five hunting arrows,  
 Large ones, and sharp, and he had  
 Sense enough left that he took  
 The boy's bow, and took the arrows           2820  
 The boy had with him. But nothing  
 He had done stayed in his mind:  
 He remembered none of it. And then  
 He lay in wait for the forest  
 Animals, and killed them, and ate           2825  
 Their flesh completely raw.  
 And that was how he lived  
 In the woods, like a madman or a savage,  
 Until he came on a squat  
 And tiny house that belonged           2830  
 To a hermit, who was clearing ground  
 For a garden. And seeing Yvain  
 All naked, he knew at once  
 That the man's mind was not right,  
 Which was true, of course. And the hermit           2835  
 Was terribly afraid, and shut  
 Himself in his tiny house.  
 But the good man took a bit  
 Of his bread, and some pure water,  
 And for charity's sake set them           2840  
 Outside, on a narrow window.  
 And Yvain came, hungering  
 For the bread, which he snatched up and bolted.  
 He'd never in his life tasted  
 Such hard, coarse stuff, and sour,           2845  
 Baked out of grain worth  
 A couple of pennies, at most,

Baked from rotten barley  
And straw, or more like husks  
Or shells than cake, mouldy           2850  
All through, and dry as bark.  
But hunger hurt him, and forced him,  
And he thought it tasted like porridge,  
For hunger is a lovely, well-made  
Sauce for any food.           2855  
And he finished every bite  
Of the hermit's bread, and enjoyed it,  
And drank some good cold water.  
And after he'd eaten he went back  
To the wood, and hunted deer.           2860  
And seeing him leave, the good man,  
Hiding under his roof,  
Prayed for God to preserve  
And protect him, and keep Yvain  
Away. But no one, no matter           2865  
How crack-brained, thinks of staying  
Away from a place where he's treated  
Well. So as long as the frenzy  
Was on him not a day would pass  
But Yvain would bring the hermit           2870  
Some wild beast, and leave it  
At his door. And that was his life.  
And the good man made it his business  
To skin most of the carcasses  
And cook the meat, and whenever           2875  
The madman wanted to eat  
And drink there was bread and water  
Waiting on the window, and so  
He ate and he drank, his meat  
Unsalted, and no pepper, and his drink           2880  
Cold water fresh from a spring.  
And the good man made it his business  
To sell the hides and buy bread  
Baked of good barley or oats

Or wheat, so Yvain was well 2885  
Supplied with both bread and meat,  
Which could last him a long, long time.  
Until one day two girls,  
And their mistress with them, in whose service  
Both were engaged, found him 2890  
Sleeping in the forest. And one of them,  
As soon as she saw the naked  
Man, dismounted and ran  
And stared at him hard, trying  
To find something about him 2895  
From which she might know his name.  
Had Yvain been dressed as he'd always  
Been, many and many  
A day, in rich and noble  
Robes, she'd have known him at once. 2900  
But it took her time to know him,  
And she stared and stared until,  
At last, she became aware  
Of a scar on his face, just such  
A scar as she'd seen on the face 2905  
Of my lord Yvain, and she knew it,  
For she'd seen it often. And the scar  
Made it all clear: it was him,  
She had no doubt. But what  
A wondrous thing to behold 2910  
What he'd come to, to find him in the woods,  
Naked and poor. She watched him,  
Amazed, crossing herself,  
But neither touched nor awoke him.  
She took her horse, and remounted, 2915  
And went back to the others, and weeping  
Told them everything she'd seen.  
Should I stop to tell you all the grief  
She showed? I don't know. In any  
Event, she said to her mistress, 2920  
Weeping: "My lady! I've found

Yvain, the most famous knight  
In the world, and the best. But what sin  
Has stricken this noble man  
I haven't the faintest idea.           2925  
I expect he's experienced some sorrow,  
And it's brought him to this. It's easy  
For grief to drive you mad.  
And anyone can see it, and know it:  
The man's quite out of his mind.           2930  
For he'd never permit himself  
To be seen so shamefully if he hadn't  
Lost his senses. Would God  
Had restored him exactly as he was,  
In the best of health and mind,           2935  
And made him willing and able  
To come to your aid! For Count  
Alier, with whom you're at war,  
Has launched a bitter attack.  
But the war between you two           2940  
Would be quickly settled in your favor  
If God gave you the blessed  
Good fortune to have him restored  
To his senses, and led him to take  
Your side in this time of need."           2945  
Said the lady: "Be careful! For surely,  
If he doesn't escape us, I think  
That with God's assistance we may  
Be able to drive all this frenzy  
And storm from his head, and return him           2950  
To himself. But we'll have to hurry.  
I remember a magic ointment,  
Given me by Morgan le Fay,  
Who told me no fever in the brain  
Could resist it. It will cure them all."           2955  
And at once they headed back  
To her castle, not more than half  
A mile distant (the way they measure

Miles in that country, as compared  
To us, calling two miles           2960  
One, and four miles two).  
Yvain stayed alone, sleeping,  
And the lady hunted for the ointment.  
She went to her linen chest,  
Unlocked it, took out a box           2965  
And gave it to the girl, warning her  
Not to use it too freely.  
His temples and his forehead should be rubbed:  
There was no need to use it elsewhere.  
Only his temples required           2970  
The ointment; the rest should be kept.  
There was nothing wrong with any  
Part of him except his brain.  
And she told her to bring a fur-lined  
Cloak, and scarlet silk clothes.           2975  
And the girl took them, and her right hand  
Led a fine horse. And she added  
A shirt and some well-spun breeches,  
And beautiful new stockings, all  
Her own. She rode off quickly,           2980  
With all these things, and found him  
Still sleeping, there where she'd left him.  
She put the horses in a sheltered  
Spot, and tied them exceedingly  
Carefully and well, then carrying           2985  
The clothes and the ointment she walked  
Where he lay asleep on the ground.  
And it took great courage to approach  
The madman as she did, meaning  
To touch and to handle him. Then she took           2990  
The ointment and rubbed him with it  
Until none was left in the box,  
So anxious to cure him that she rubbed him  
Everywhere, till she'd used it all,  
Paying no attention to her mistress'           2995

Warning—indeed, completely  
Forgetting it. She rubbed in more  
Than could ever be needed, but hardly  
Enough, in her opinion.  
She rubbed from his temples and his forehead                      3000  
Right down to his toes. She rubbed  
His temples and all his body  
So well, in that bright warm sun,  
That all his frenzy and his sadness  
Slipped right out of his brain.                      3005  
But she was foolish to anoint his body:  
It was hardly necessary. And yet,  
I suspect she'd have done the same thing  
If the box had held five times  
As much. Then carrying away                      3010  
The box, she went to rest  
Near the horses, but carefully didn't  
Take the clothing: if God  
Restored him to his senses, she wanted him  
To see it, and take it, and wear it.                      3015  
Hiding herself behind  
A huge oak, she waited till he'd slept  
All he wanted, and woke, and was cured,  
His mind and his memory recovered.  
And seeing himself naked                      3020  
As ivory, he was terribly ashamed,  
But it would have been worse had he known  
Everything he'd done. But all  
He knew was his nakedness. And he saw  
The new clothes, and was deeply astonished:                      3025  
How had that gown come  
To be there? Who could have brought it?  
But the sight of his naked flesh  
Oppressed him, and bewildered him, and he said  
To himself: I am dead, betrayed,                      3030  
If anyone finds me, and I'm wearing  
Nothing, and they know who I am.

And as he spoke he got dressed  
And looked toward the forest, watching  
To see if anyone came. 3035  
He tried to stand up, unaided,  
But could not; neither could he walk.  
And seeing that he needed help,  
And knew it, and was ready to accept it,  
Overcome with such intense weakness 3040  
That he could scarcely stay on his feet,  
The girl decided not to wait  
Any longer, but got up on her horse  
And rode on by him, pretending  
Not to know he was there. And knowing 3045  
How badly he needed help,  
Someone to bring him to some refuge  
And the chance to recover his strength,  
And not caring who helped him, he forced  
Himself to call to her, as loudly 3050  
As he could. And the girl obligingly  
Looked all around, as if  
Unable to understand what was happening.  
And apparently bewildered, she went this way  
And then that, not wishing to head 3055  
Straight toward him. And he started to call her  
Again: "Girl! This way!  
This way!" And she let her horse  
Go slowly toward him. And pretending  
As she had, she made him think 3060  
She'd never seen him before  
And hadn't the faintest idea  
Who he was. It was wisely and courteously  
Done. And reaching him, she said:  
"Knight! What is it you wish, 3065  
Calling me so very urgently?"  
"Ah!" he said, "wise girl!  
Somehow, by some ill luck,  
I find myself in this wood.



For the sake of God and your faith                    3070  
In Him, I beg you, help me,  
Lend me, give me that horse  
You're leading behind you." "Most willingly,  
Dear sir. But come with me,  
There where I'm going." "Which is where?"                    3075  
He said. "Out of this forest,  
To a nearby castle." "Girl!  
Tell me: have you some need  
Of my service as a knight?" "Yes,"  
She answered. "But it seems to me                    3080  
You're not in good health. For the next  
Two weeks, at least, you ought  
To be resting. Take the reins  
Of this horse I'm leading, and come,  
We'll ride to the castle where I live."                    3085  
And wishing to do exactly  
What she asked, he took it, and mounted,  
And off they went. And they came  
To a bridge across a swift-flowing  
Stream, and the girl threw in                    3090  
The empty box she was carrying.  
She meant to excuse herself  
To her mistress, for using too much  
Of the ointment. She would tell her that as luck  
Had it, passing across                    3095  
The bridge she'd dropped the box—  
Her horse had stumbled under her,  
And the box had slipped from her hand,  
And what's more, she'd almost fallen  
After it herself, and that                    3100  
Would have been a greater loss.  
She meant to concoct this lie  
As soon as she stood in her lady's  
Presence. So they rode on together,  
Until they came to the castle,                    3105  
And the lady gladly welcomed

My lord Yvain, and as soon  
As she could she got the girl  
Alone and asked for her box  
And her magic ointment, and the girl                      3110

Told her exactly the lie  
She'd invented, not daring to tell her  
The truth. And her mistress was fiercely  
Angry, and said: "This  
Is a very serious loss.                      3115

I haven't a doubt in the world  
It will never be found. Never.  
When a thing is gone, it's gone;  
I shall have to do without it.

How often we wish for something,                      3120

And instead of good it turns out  
Bad. And I, who expected  
Good fortune and joy of this knight,  
Have lost my best and most cherished  
Possession of all. Ah well:                      3125

Despite this, I wish you to serve him  
Well; give him what he needs."

"Ah, my lady! How well  
You've spoken! How vulgar it would be  
To turn one misfortune into two."                      3130

They said no more of the box,  
And did everything they could to help  
My lord Yvain, bathing him  
And washing his hair, and having it  
Clipped, and his face shaved—                      3135

For you could have plucked handfuls  
Of hair from his face. There was nothing  
He wanted that he did not have:  
If he asked for armor, he got it;  
If he asked for a horse, they immediately                      3140  
Gave him a great strong beast,  
And a beauty. And he stayed there until,

One Tuesday, the count Alier  
And all his men came to town,  
And set fires, and plundered, and robbed. 3145  
And those who lived there mounted  
Their horses and took up their weapons  
And armed or not they went out  
To attack their attackers, who for their part  
Were far too proud to flee, 3150  
But allowed the defenders to come to them.  
And Yvain rushed at them, and struck at them,  
Having rested so long that his strength  
Had returned. And he hit so hard,  
Right through a knight's shield, that according 3155  
To my sources he tumbled both knight  
And horse together in a heap,  
From which that knight would never  
Rise, again, for his heart  
Was ruptured, deep in his guts, 3160  
And his backbone was crushed. And then  
Yvain drew back a bit,  
Before he attacked once more,  
And protecting himself with his shield  
Began to sweep the invaders 3165  
Away. And it would have been hard  
To count from one to four  
Before you could have seen him  
Cast down four knights, quickly  
And completely. And those who were with him 3170  
Were suddenly encouraged, and turned  
Into warriors, for many a mean-spirited  
Wretch, and a coward, seeing  
A brave man take on a difficult  
Struggle right in front of his eyes, 3175  
Is attacked by shame, overwhelmed,  
And throws his miserable heart  
Out of his body and acquires  
A true knight's spirit, brave

And noble and strong. And all                    3180  
The defenders became brave, and each of them  
Held his ground well, there  
In that battle, and fought with honor.  
And the lady, standing high  
In her castle tower, saw                    3185  
The battle and the assault, the struggle  
For land and for right, saw more  
Than enough men lying on the ground,  
Some wounded, some dead, some  
Of her own men, and some of the enemy's,                    3190  
But more of the others than hers,  
For my lord Yvain, courteous  
And brave and good, made them  
Beg for his mercy, like a falcon  
Hunting freshwater ducks.                    3195  
And those who stood on the castle  
Walls, men and women  
Alike, watching the fighting,  
All said: "What a splendid soldier!  
How he makes his enemies surrender,                    3200  
How fiercely he attacks them! He rushes  
Among them like a lion hunting  
Deer, impelled by pain  
And hunger. And because of him all  
Our other knights are braver                    3205  
And bolder—and indeed, if it weren't  
For him, and only for him,  
No spear would ever have been splintered,  
No sword lifted and swung.  
Love and cherish so noble                    3210  
A man, when there's one to be found.  
Just see how he proves himself,  
Just see how he holds our lines  
Together, see how his spear  
And his sword are splashed with blood,                    3215  
See how he chases them down,

See how he drives them off,  
How he comes and goes and goes at them,  
How he steps back, when he must,  
But only for a little rest,                    3220  
And quickly back into battle.  
See how he wins his honor,  
Not worrying about his shield,  
Letting them cut it to bits.  
He shows them no mercy—none!                    3225  
See how eagerly he gives them  
Back the blows they give him.  
If all the Argonne forest  
Were cut down to make his spears,  
There'd be none of them left by nightfall,                    3230  
For all of the spearheads they give him  
He breaks—and calls for more.  
Just see how he swings his sword,  
When he needs to use it. Roland  
Himself never slaughtered so many,                    3235  
Slashing with Durendal, his sword,  
Not even at Roncevaux or in Spain!  
If only he had with him some comrades  
As good as himself, that villain  
Who's given us such cause for complaint                    3240  
Would be beaten, today, and he'd run—  
Or be utterly shamed, if he stayed.”  
And they said that anyone who'd given  
Her love to such a man  
Would be blessed—a man so powerful                    3245  
In battle, recognized over all  
Other men, like a torch among candles,  
Or the moon against the stars,  
Or the sun against the moon.  
And each of them said to the other                    3250  
That they wished as hard as they could,  
Seeing his strength and his skill,  
That he were married to their lady

And ruled their people and their land.

So everyone who saw him praised him,                    3255  
And simply told the truth—  
For he'd laid into their enemies  
So well that one outran  
The other. And he followed them fiercely,  
And all his comrades with him,                    3260  
All of them feeling as safe  
At his side as if enclosed  
In a high, a thick stone wall.  
The chase was long, and hard,  
Until the hunted grew weary,                    3265  
And the hunters cut them to pieces,  
And cut the guts from their horses,  
And the living rolled on the dead,  
Stabbing at each other, and killing.  
The slaughter was ghastly, was murderous.                    3270  
And still the Count kept running,  
And lord Yvain ran after him,  
Never faltering at his heels.  
And on they ran, until  
At the foot of a steep hill                    3275  
He caught him, close to the entrance  
Of one of the Count's forts.  
And so the Count was captured,  
And no one could possibly help him,  
And without a great many words                    3280  
He surrendered to my lord Yvain.  
For as soon as he had him in his hands,  
And they stood alone, man to man,  
There was no way the Count could escape,  
Or hide, or defend himself.                    3285  
And so he swore to surrender  
To the lady of Noroison,  
And make himself her prisoner,  
And accept such peace as she gave him.

And after he'd sworn his surrender, 3290  
 Yvain obliged him to give up  
 His helmet, drop the shield  
 From his neck, and hand over his sword.  
 And honor had come to Yvain,  
 Capturing the Count and giving him 3295  
 Into his enemies' hands,  
 Who made no secret of their pleasure.  
 And the news travelled before them,  
 Coming to town before  
 They arrived. And everyone went out 3300  
 To meet them, and the lady first  
 Of all. And Yvain held  
 His prisoner by the hand, and gave him  
 To her. And the Count gave in  
 At once to everything she asked, 3305  
 And swore the most solemn oaths  
 To keep his promises. And the pledges  
 He gave her, and swore to, promised  
 Eternal peace between them,  
 And compensation for her losses 3310  
 (Providing she offered good proof),  
 And reconstruction of all  
 The houses he'd levelled to the ground.  
 And when all these things were arranged  
 Exactly as the lady deserved, 3315  
 Yvain requested permission  
 To leave her. She'd never have agreed,  
 Had he been willing to have her  
 As his mistress, or take her as his wife.  
 And Yvain forbade them to escort him 3320  
 Or follow him a single step,  
 But left them as fast as he could:  
 Nothing they said persuaded him.  
 And off he went, retracing  
 His path, and leaving the lady 3325  
 Miserable, though at first he'd made her

So happy. And the happier he'd made her,  
The more he distressed and afflicted her,  
Refusing to stay any longer,  
For she wished she could honor him, she'd gladly        3330  
Have made him, if only he'd consent,  
Lord of everything she owned,  
Or given him some immense reward,  
In return for the service he'd rendered her,  
As huge a reward as he'd take.        3335  
But he wished to listen to no one,  
No man and no woman. And he left  
The lady and her knights, all of them  
Deeply unhappy, no one  
Able to keep him among them.        3340

And then my lord Yvain,  
Thoughtful, travelled through  
A deep wood, and there he heard  
A great loud cry, and hurried  
Directly toward it, following        3345  
The sound. And when he arrived  
At that place, he saw a clearing  
In the forest, and a lion, and a snake,  
Which had the lion by the tail  
And was burning him up, consuming him        3350  
With sheets of intense hot flame.  
My lord Yvain didn't waste  
Much time watching this wonder.  
He asked himself which  
Of the two he ought to help,        3355  
Then told himself to help  
The lion, for a venomous and treacherous  
Beast should not be permitted  
To do evil. And snakes are venomous,  
And fire leaps from their mouths,        3360  
Overflowing with treachery. And so  
My lord Yvain thought



Of killing the snake first.  
He drew his sword and stepped forward,  
Holding his shield in front of        3365  
His face, to keep the flames  
From harming him, fire pouring  
From its jaws, gaping wider  
Than a boiler. And then, if the lion  
Attacked him, there'd be plenty of fighting.        3370  
But whatever happened, he'd made up  
His mind to help the lion,  
For pity urged him on,  
Begging him to rescue that noble,  
Highborn beast. And swinging        3375  
His sword, which cut so smoothly,  
He began to attack the snake,  
Cutting him clean through to the ground,  
Then slicing him in half, and striking him  
Over and over, till he'd chopped him        3380  
To tiny pieces. But because  
The snake had gripped the lion's  
Tail in his poisonous teeth,  
He was forced to chop a piece  
From the tail, but he cut only        3385  
As much as he had to, and he had  
No choice, there was no other way.  
And when he'd freed the lion  
He was sure the animal would attack him,  
And he'd have to fight, but fighting        3390  
Was not what the lion intended.  
Now hear what that lion did!  
Showing his nobility and goodness,  
He began to make it clear  
That he surrendered himself to Yvain:        3395  
Placing his front feet together,  
He stood erect on his hind legs  
And bowed his face toward the earth.  
And then he knelt again,

And his face was wet all over                    3400  
 With humble tears. And my lord  
 Yvain knew without doubt  
 That the lion was offering him thanks  
 And humbling himself before  
 His deliverer, who in killing the snake                    3405  
 Had saved him from certain death.  
 And Yvain was deeply pleased.  
 He dried his sword, stained  
 With the snake's venom, and its filth,  
 Then thrust it back in its scabbard                    3410  
 And went on his way. And the lion  
 Began to walk beside him,  
 Determined never to leave,  
 But always to go where he went,  
 To serve and protect him. And so                    3415  
 He set out in front of Yvain,  
 Until as he trotted along  
 The wind blew him the scent  
 Of wild beasts grazing, and hunger  
 And natural instinct set him                    3420  
 Running and hunting for his food:  
 And that was simply nature's  
 Way, he did what he had to.  
 He'd begin to follow a trail,  
 As if to show his master                    3425  
 That he'd found the scent of some wild  
 Animal, met it on the wind.  
 Then, watching Yvain, he would stop,  
 Wanting to please him, not wanting  
 In any way to go                    3430  
 Against his wishes. And Yvain  
 Noted the look on his face,  
 Which showed him that the lion was waiting.  
 He saw it, and knew what it meant:  
 If he stayed where he was, the lion                    3435  
 Would stay; if he followed, the lion

Would catch the game he had scented.  
 And Yvain urged him on,  
 Shouting as he'd shout to a pack  
 Of hounds. And the lion immediately                      3440  
 Sniffed out the trail, and followed it,  
 Knowing exactly what it meant,  
 And hardly running a bow-shot  
 Away before he saw  
 A single deer, grazing                      3445  
 In a valley. He'll catch it, if he can,  
 And he does, at the very first leap,  
 And drinks its fresh hot blood.  
 And after the kill, he put  
 The deer on his back, and brought it                      3450  
 Where he saw his master coming,  
 And Yvain felt such a rush  
 Of affection that he took him to be  
 His companion through all the days  
 Of his life, so great was his love.                      3455  
     And now it was nearly night,  
 And Yvain decided to sleep there,  
 And to cut as much as he wanted  
 To eat from the dead deer.  
 And so he began to skin it,                      3460  
 Splitting along the side,  
 Then slicing a steak from the loin,  
 And using his flint to strike  
 A spark, he kindled dry  
 Brushwood, then pierced his steak                      3465  
 On a wooden spit and set  
 To roasting it through and through.  
 But he took no pleasure in eating it  
 Without bread or wine or salt,  
 No table cloth, no carving set—nothing.                      3470  
 As he ate, the lion lay  
 Motionless beside him, watching him  
 The whole time, until

He'd eaten as much as he wanted  
Of his steak, and could eat no more.            3475  
And whatever was left of the deer  
The lion ate to the bone.

Yvain then slept through the night,  
His head resting on his shield,  
Sleeping as well as he could,            3480  
And the lion showed such good sense  
That he stayed awake, carefully  
Guarding the horse, who grazed  
In the grass, which wasn't very good.

In the morning they left together,            3485  
And as far as I know they began  
To lead exactly the sort  
Of existence they'd shared that night,  
And so it went, for almost  
Two weeks, until they chanced on            3490  
The spring under the pine tree.

And there my lord Yvain  
Almost went mad again,  
Approaching that spring, and the stone,  
And the chapel that stood beside them.            3495

He sighed a thousand sad  
And weary sighs, then fainted,  
And his sword slipped from its scabbard  
And its well-sharpened point nicked him  
On the cheek, above the neck,            3500  
Cut him through the rings of his mail-shirt.

No metal mesh is perfect:  
The tip of the sword slipped through  
His shining mail and slit  
His skin, and blood fell.            3505  
The lion thought he saw  
His lord and master dead.  
No one could ever find words  
To tell of sadder or louder

Noises than he started to make! 3510  
 He rolled on the ground, and roared,  
 And decided to kill himself  
 With the sword he thought had killed  
 His loving master. And taking  
 The sword in his teeth he propped it 3515  
 Erect on a fallen tree,  
 And steadied its hilt on another  
 Tree, so it could not slip  
 When he ran his chest against it.  
 He'd nearly done what he meant 3520  
 To do, when Yvain came to,  
 And the lion swerved aside  
 In his desperate rush at death,  
 Charging like a wild boar  
 Who pays no attention, but just runs. 3525  
 My lord Yvain lay near  
 The stone, where he'd fallen in his faint,  
 And as he recovered bitterly  
 Accused himself for exceeding  
 His year's leave and making 3530  
 His lady hate him: "Why can't he  
 Kill himself, this miserable  
 Creature from whom joy has fled?  
 Oh lord, why don't I do it?  
 How can I stand here and see  
 These things that belong to my wife? 3535  
 Why does my soul remain  
 In this body, this miserable home?  
 It would never know such agony  
 If it had gone away. Hating  
 And blaming and despising myself 3540  
 As I do is what I deserve.  
 Whoever loses happiness  
 And comfort because of his own  
 Wrongs should hate himself  
 To death. He should kill himself. 3545

And I, alone, unseen,  
Why do I spare myself?  
And haven't I seen this lion,  
Who felt such grief for me  
That he was ready to set my sword            3550  
Against his chest and thrust it  
In? Should I be afraid  
Of death, who changed joy to sadness?  
Joy has left me. Joy?  
What's that? I'll say no more of it,            3555  
Who have nothing left to say.  
I've asked a stupid question.  
That which I had in my hands  
Was the greatest joy of all,  
But I couldn't keep it. And he            3560  
Who loses such joy, and loses it  
For good cause, has no right to happiness."

And while he moaned and ranted  
A miserable prisoner, a woman  
Who'd been shut in that chapel, saw him,            3565  
And heard every word he said,  
Through the cracks in the wall. And as soon  
As his fainting spell had ended  
She called out loud: "Lord!  
Who do I hear out there?            3570  
Who is it, complaining like that?"  
And he answered: "And who are you?"  
"I am a prisoner," she answered,  
"The most miserable person alive."  
And he answered: "Be quiet, you idiot!            3575  
Compared to what I am suffering  
Your sadness is joy, your evil  
Is good. The more a man  
Is accustomed to a happy life,  
The more he's distracted and bewildered            3580  
By sorrow, if it comes to him. Even

A feeble man can carry  
 A burden, simply from habit,  
 That someone of infinitely greater  
 Strength can't manage at all." 3585  
 "Indeed!" she said. "I quite  
 Understand how truly you've spoken,  
 But I hardly believe it gives you  
 The right to say your misfortune  
 Is greater than mine. And it's not. 3590  
 For you, I believe, can go  
 Wherever you like, and I  
 Am imprisoned in here, and fate  
 Has so arranged it that tomorrow  
 They'll come to this place and take me 3595  
 Away, under sentence of death."  
 "My God!" said he. "For what crime?"  
 "Good knight! May God deny me  
 Eternal mercy for my soul  
 If in any way I've deserved this! 3600  
 But I'll tell you the simple truth,  
 Without a lying word,  
 As to why I'm here in this prison.  
 I've been accused of treason,  
 And there's no one I can find to defend me, 3605  
 To keep me from the stake or the gallows."  
 "Well," he went on, "in the first place,  
 Plainly my sorrow and my pain  
 Are greater than yours, for there could be  
 Someone, could there not, who could come 3610  
 And save you from this danger. Isn't that  
 True?" "Yes. But who?  
 There's no one I know who would do it.  
 There are only two men in all  
 The world who would dare to defend me 3615  
 By fighting three men at once."  
 "What? My God, against three?"  
 "Yes, my lord, I assure you.

There are three who accuse me of treason.”

“And who are those, who love you                    3620

So much, that either of them

Might be brave enough to fight

Against three in order to save you?”

“I'll tell you the simple truth:

One is my lord Gawain,                    3625

The other is my lord Yvain—

And Yvain is the reason I'll be wrongly

Brought to martyrdom and to death.”

“For whom?” he exclaimed. “For whom?”

“My lord! So help me God,                    3630

Because of King Urien's son.”

“Now I understand! But if

You die, he'll die too.

For I am that same Yvain

Because of whom you live                    3635

In such terror. And you, I think,

Are the girl who kept me in that room,

Who protected me, who saved my life

And my body when I was trapped

Between the two gates, when I                    3640

Was troubled and miserable, when I

Was worried and desperate and unsure.

And I'd have been killed or captured,

If you hadn't helped me. Now tell me,

My sweet good friend! Who                    3645

Has accused you of treason and had you

Shut away in this dungeon?”

“My lord! I'll hide nothing from you,

Not when you've asked me to speak.

It's true: I was hardly halfhearted,                    3650

I helped you loyally when you needed it.

It was my advice that led

My lady to receive you; she listened

To me, she believed what I said.

And by the holy Rosary                    3655



I did it more for her good  
Than yours. That's what I thought—  
And I still think. I admit it: I worked  
For her honor, and your desire,  
So help me God! But when 3660  
It turned out that you were staying  
Away longer than a year,  
And you ought to be back with my lady  
But weren't, she grew angry with me,  
Thinking she'd been betrayed 3665  
By following my advice.  
And as soon as her steward found out,  
He saw his chance to stir up  
Trouble between her and me—  
A dishonest, thieving scoundrel 3670  
Who'd always been jealous of me,  
Because my lady believed me,  
And trusted me, more than him.  
In her court, in front of everyone,  
He accused me of treachery on your 3675  
Behalf. And there was no one to help me  
Except myself, though I knew  
I'd never betrayed my lady,  
Not in deed or in word. Never!  
I was horrified, and I answered—not bothering 3680  
To consult with anyone—that I'd  
Be defended by a single knight,  
Who would fight with three accusers  
At once. And he hadn't the courtesy  
To deny my offer. I'd said it, 3685  
And he wouldn't let me withdraw it  
Or take it back, no matter  
What. So they took me at my word,  
And I had only forty  
Days to find a knight 3690  
Willing and able to fight  
Against three at once. I was pledged,

It was done. I've been to many  
 Courts, including King Arthur's,  
 But no one could help me, and no one                    3695  
 Could give me any useful word  
 Of you, for they had no news."  
 "But tell me: my lord Gawain,  
 So gracious, so good, where was he?  
 No helpless girl has ever                    3700  
 Come to him for help  
 And found him unwilling to give it."  
 "Had I found him at court, I know  
 That nothing I asked for would ever  
 Have been denied me. But some knight                    3705  
 Had stolen away the queen,  
 Or so they told me. And surely  
 The king was out of his mind  
 To let her go anywhere near him.  
 It was Kay, I think, who took her                    3710  
 To meet the knight who carried  
 Her off, which disturbed my lord  
 Gawain so much that he's gone  
 To find her. And he'll never come back  
 Until he's found her, he'll never                    3715  
 Rest. And there's the whole truth,  
 I've told you everything that happened.  
 Tomorrow, I'm sure to die  
 A contemptible death, burned  
 At the stake for the wrongs you've committed!"                    3720  
 And he answered: "God forbid  
 That anyone hurt you on my  
 Account! While I'm alive  
 You're safe! Expect me tomorrow,  
 Ready to do what I can,                    3725  
 Offering my body for your freedom,  
 As indeed I ought to do.  
 But be careful, tell no one here  
 Who I am—no one! However

The battle goes, make sure                    3730  
 That no one knows my name!"  
 "Of course, my lord! No one  
 Could torture it out of me.  
 I'd rather they killed me first,  
 Since you wish no one to know you.                    3735  
 But I beg you, all the same,  
 Not to return simply  
 For me. I've no desire  
 To see you in so dangerous a battle.  
 I thank you for your promise of help,                    3740  
 Given so willingly, but consider  
 Yourself released from all burdens.  
 Better that I die, only I,  
 Than to see them rejoicing first  
 At your death, and then at mine—                    3745  
 For they'd never let me go,  
 Once you'd been killed. It's better  
 That you remain alive  
 Than they kill the two of us at once."  
 "Now that is very insulting,                    3750  
 My friend!" answered Yvain.  
 "Perhaps you really don't wish  
 Deliverance from death, or else  
 You look down at the sort of assistance  
 I've offered to give you. I refuse                    3755  
 To discuss it any longer. With all  
 You've done for me, it's utterly  
 Impossible that I fail to help you  
 No matter what you may need.  
 I understand that you're very frightened,                    3760  
 But with God's good help, and I trust  
 In Him, I'll dishonor the three of them.  
 That's enough of that: I'm off  
 To find some lodging in this wood,  
 For there's nothing available here."                    3765  
 "My lord!" she answered. "May God

Give you good shelter, and good night,  
And keep you, as I pray He will,  
Safe from anything that might harm you!”  
So Yvain left her, and the lion,           3770  
As usual, followed behind him,  
And they went along till they came  
To a baron’s stronghold, a castle  
Completely enclosed by a thick  
Stone wall, tall and well built.           3775  
No catapult, no stone-throwing machine,  
Could hope to attack that castle,  
Built and fortified as it was,  
And yet outside its walls  
The earth had been levelled so flat           3780  
That neither house nor hut  
Remained. You’ll learn the reason  
Later, when it’s time to know it.  
My lord Yvain came straight  
Toward the castle, taking the road           3785  
As it led him, and seven servants  
Came out to meet him, and let  
The drawbridge down. But as soon  
As they saw the lion who was with him  
They were terribly frightened, and asked           3790  
Yvain, if it pleased him, to leave  
The lion at the gate, so he couldn’t  
Hurt them or kill them. And he answered:  
“Say no more! If he can’t  
Come in, neither can I.           3795  
Either receive us both  
Or I remain out here:  
I love him as I love myself.  
And yet, there’s nothing to fear!  
I’ll watch him so carefully that you’ll all           3800  
Be perfectly safe.” And they answered:  
“May it be as you say!” And so  
They entered that walled town,

And went until they met  
Knights and ladies and pretty            3805  
Young girls coming toward them,  
Greeting Yvain, ready  
To help him dismount and take off  
His armor. And they said: "Welcome,  
Good knight! Welcome among us!            3810  
And may God grant it that you stay  
Until you're able to leave  
Happy and full of honor!"  
From the highest down to the lowest  
They welcomed him, and put themselves out            3815  
To lead him joyously to the castle.  
And then, expressing their joy,  
They fell into a fit  
Of sadness, and forgot their happiness,  
And began to moan and cry            3820  
And weep and tear at themselves.  
And on and on they went,  
One moment happy, then weeping,  
Welcoming their guest happily  
But somehow not seeming to mean it,            3825  
For indeed there was something frightening them,  
Something that would happen tomorrow,  
They were sure, they were certain, and they thought  
It would come by noontime. And my lord  
Yvain was bewildered, seeing them            3830  
Constantly changing from sadness  
To joy, and from joy to sadness,  
So he spoke to the lord of the castle  
And asked him, please, to explain.  
"Good God, dear sir!" he exclaimed,            3835  
"I beg you, tell me why  
I've been welcomed with so much honor,  
Such joy, and so much weeping?"  
"Yes, if you wish to know.  
But you'd do better to forget            3840

You asked, to prefer silence.  
And I prefer not to tell you  
Anything to make you unhappy.  
Just let us grieve as we must,  
And pay no attention.” “Impossible,” 3845  
Yvain answered. “I could never  
See you struck by such sadness  
And not feel it in my heart, too.  
And so I ask you again,  
No matter what sadness it might bring me.” 3850  
“Well then,” was the answer, “I’ll tell you.  
I’ve been deeply afflicted by a giant.  
He wants me to give him my daughter,  
Whose beauty surpasses that  
Of any girl in the world. 3855  
And the name of this monster, may God  
Destroy him, is Harpin of the Mountain.  
And every day he steals  
Anything of mine he can get at.  
No one has a better right 3860  
Than I to complain and be sorrowful.  
I may lose my mind from grief,  
For I had six sons, all knights,  
Handsome than any in the world,  
And this giant has captured them all. 3865  
He killed two while I watched,  
And tomorrow he’ll kill the others  
Unless I can find someone  
To fight him for their freedom, or else  
Hand over my daughter—and he says 3870  
That, once he has her, he intends  
To give her to the vilest, the filthiest  
Knave he can find in his household,  
For their entertainment. He  
Himself wouldn’t stoop so low. 3875  
And this is the grief I wait for,  
Tomorrow, if God does not help me.

It's hardly remarkable, my dear  
Good sir, if all of us weep.  
But for your sake, and politeness, we're trying        3880  
As best we can for a moment  
Or two of laughter and delight:  
Anyone who invites a true gentleman  
To visit,-and fails to honor him,  
Is a fool, and you strike me as noble        3885  
Indeed. Now you've heard everything,  
The entire story of our sorrow.  
The giant has left us nothing,  
Neither in this castle nor the town  
Around it, except what you see.        3890  
You may have noticed, yourself,  
As you came here this evening, how he's left us  
Nothing that might be worth  
An egg, except these walls—  
And they're new, for he levelled the town.        3895  
When he'd stolen everything he wanted,  
He set fire to the rest. And these  
Are the evil things he's done to me.”

My lord Yvain listened  
To everything his host told him,        3900  
And when he'd heard him out  
He was happy to answer him: “Sir!”  
He said. “Your troubles distress me,  
And make me exceedingly angry,  
But one thing I find astonishing:        3905  
Tell me, why haven't you sought  
For help at King Arthur's court?  
No one, no matter how mighty,  
Could come to that court and not find  
Someone willing to test        3910  
Their prowess against his.” And then  
That wealthy baron explained  
That yes, he'd surely have had

The help he needed, if only  
 He'd known where to find Sir Gawain.                      3915  
 "He'd never have taken it lightly,  
 For my wife is his sister by blood.  
 But a knight from some strange country,  
 Who came to that court seeking her,  
 Has taken the king's wife.                      3920  
 He could never have led her away,  
 To be sure, entirely by himself.  
 It was Kay, who so befuddled  
 The king that he allowed the queen  
 To pass under his protection.                      3925  
 The king was a fool, and the queen  
 Reckless, entrusting herself  
 To Kay. But I am the one  
 Who truly suffers, and loses,  
 For who can doubt that my lord                      3930  
 Gawain, that noble knight,  
 Would have hurried here as fast  
 As he could, had he known this was happening,  
 Would have saved his niece and his nephews.  
 But he knows nothing, which hurts me                      3935  
 So deeply that my heart is half broken.  
 Gawain has gone off hunting  
 The villain who stole the queen—  
 May God bring him sorrow and shame!"  
 Sigh after sigh came                      3940  
 From Yvain, hearing these words.  
 Pity worked in him and made him  
 Answer: "My dear good sir!  
 I'll be glad to take on this adventure,  
 And its dangers, if only the giant                      3945  
 And your sons come here tomorrow  
 Early enough not  
 To cause me too much delay,  
 Because by noon tomorrow  
 I must be somewhere else,                      3950



As I've given my word to be."

"Good sir!" exclaimed the baron,

"I thank you a thousand times,

And more, for your willingness to help."

And all the folk of his household                      3955

Spoke exactly as he had.

And then his daughter came

From an inside room, graceful

And beautiful and pleasing, and exceedingly

Modest, sad, and silent.                      3960

Her sorrows knew no limit;

She walked with her head bent low,

And her mother walked beside her,

Showing their obedience to their lord,

The host of that house, who'd sent for them.                      3965

They came with their mantles wrapped

Around them, to cover their tears,

And he ordered them to open their mantles

And raise their heads, saying:

"You shouldn't be upset because                      3970

I've asked you to come out. God

And good luck have brought us a kind

And noble knight, of wonderfully

Good birth, who promises me

He'll fight the giant. Don't wait                      3975

Another moment, don't

Delay: throw yourselves

At his feet!" "God keep me from any

Such sight!" said Yvain at once.

"Now, it would hardly be right                      3980

For my lord Gawain's sister

To throw herself at my feet,

Nor his niece. May God protect me

From ever feeling such pride

That I let them lie at my feet!                      3985

Please: I could never forget

My shame, if I ever permitted it.  
 But surely they can allow  
 Themselves to be pleased and comforted,  
 At least till tomorrow, when they'll know                    3990  
 If God wishes them to be helped.  
 I've no need to ask for anything  
 Else, except that the giant  
 Come soon, so I won't break my promise.  
 For I can't permit anything                    3995  
 To keep me, tomorrow at noon,  
 From the greatest undertaking, truly,  
 That I could ever attempt."  
 And so he kept himself  
 From promising too much, worried                    4000  
 That in fact the giant might not  
 Come in time to let him  
 Reach the girl locked  
 In the chapel and be able to help her.  
 Still, what he promised was enough                    4005  
 To make them feel hopeful, and everyone  
 Offered him thanks, trusting  
 In his prowess, sure of his strength,  
 Believing he must be a hero  
 If he shares his journey with a lion                    4010  
 Who goes along beside him  
 As sweetly as any lamb.  
 And the hope he'd brought them gave them  
 Such comfort, made them so happy,  
 That they completely forgot their sorrow.                    4015  
 When the hour struck, he was led  
 To sleep in a brightly lit room,  
 Escorted to his bed by both  
 The girl and her mother, for he  
 Was already dear to them both,                    4020  
 And would have been a hundred  
 Thousand times more had they truly  
 Known his courtesy and the battles

He had won. And he and the lion  
 Lay down together, and slept. 4025  
 No one was brave enough  
 To sleep with them: indeed, they closed  
 The door of the room so tightly  
 That they couldn't come out until morning.  
 And then, when they'd unlocked the door, 4030  
 He rose and heard Mass—and waited.  
 And because of his promise he waited  
 Until the hour of prime,  
 Then called them all together,  
 Including his host, and said: 4035  
 “My lord! There’s no more time.  
 I need to go, with your leave;  
 I can't allow myself  
 To linger. Believe me, for it’s true,  
 That I'd gladly, I'd cheerfully wait 4040  
 Even longer, for the sake of Sir Gawain’s  
 Nephews, and his niece, for I love him  
 Dearly, except that the business  
 Awaiting me is desperately urgent,  
 And I've very far to go!” 4045  
 And then the girl’s mind  
 Quivered and reeled with fear,  
 And her mother’s, and her father’s too.  
 They were so afraid that he'd leave  
 That they thought of throwing themselves 4050  
 Full length at his feet, until  
 They remembered his words and realized  
 He'd think it neither good nor proper.  
 Then the baron offered to give him  
 Anything he owned, land 4055  
 Or anything else, whatever  
 He wanted, if only he'd wait  
 A bit longer. And he answered: “May God  
 Protect me from accepting anything  
 From you!” And the terrified girl 4060

Began to weep and moan,  
Begging him to stay. Utterly  
Anguished, totally distraught,  
She begged him by the glorious queen  
Of Heaven, and the angels on high,           4065  
And by God Himself, not to go,  
But to wait a little longer.  
And she begged him by her uncle, who he says  
He knows and loves and thinks well of.  
And an infinite pity seized him,           4070  
Hearing her call on him in the name  
Of the man he loved best in the world,  
And by the mother of Heaven,  
And in God's own name, to him  
The honey and sweetness of pity.           4075  
And anguish filled him, and he sighed,  
For not by his father's kingdom  
Could he see her burned at the stake,  
That girl he'd promised to help.  
He'd either go out of his mind,           4080  
Or cut his life short, if he couldn't  
Reach her in time. And yet,  
On the other hand, it pained him  
Even to think of the kindness  
Of Gawain, his friend. And his heart           4085  
Came close to splitting in his body,  
Knowing he could not wait.  
And yet he waited, not moving,  
And lingered, and stayed there longer,  
Till the giant came pounding up,           4090  
Leading along the knights  
He'd captured. A club hung from  
His neck, huge and sharpened,  
And he used it to prod them along.  
And the knights were dressed in clothing           4095  
Worth less than a straw, only  
Dirty, stinking shirts.

And he'd tied them tight, ropes  
 On their feet and hands, and mounted them  
 On four stumping packhorses,           4100  
 Swaybacked, and skinny, and feeble.  
 These horses came riding along  
 A wood, and a dwarf, puffed  
 Like an ox, had tied their tails  
 Together, and walking beside them           4105  
 Beat them as he went, with a lash  
 With four knots, plainly impressed  
 With himself and feeling most brave;  
 Indeed, he beat them till they bled.  
 And so the giant and the dwarf           4110  
 Led those knights, to their shame.  
 Stopping in front of the gate,  
 In the middle of the plain, the giant  
 Shouted to the baron that he'd kill  
 His sons, unless he handed           4115  
 Over his daughter—and her  
 He'd give to his scum, as a slut,  
 For he himself no longer  
 Cared for her or would bother to take her.  
 She'd have a thousand of the scum           4120  
 All over her, all the time,  
 Filthy, naked scum,  
 Kitchen slaves and stablemen,  
 All of them wanting their share.  
 And the baron was almost out of           4125  
 His mind, hearing how they'd use  
 His daughter as a whore, if they got her,  
 And if they didn't they'd kill  
 His four sons in front of his eyes.  
 He suffered like someone who'd rather           4130  
 Be dead than alive, exclaiming  
 “Oh God, I'm miserable!” and weeping  
 Bitter tears, and sighing.  
 And then my good and gentle

Lord Yvain spoke to him: 4135  
 “Sir! He’s cruel and presumptuous,  
 This giant, swaggering out there.  
 But God will not suffer him  
 To have your daughter in his power!  
 He’s full of contempt for her, he’d love 4140  
 To shame her, but it would be tragic  
 For such a beautiful creature,  
 Born of such noble parents,  
 To be handed over to scullions.  
 My weapons, hurry! and my horse! 4145  
 Let down the drawbridge, so I  
 Can ride out there! One  
 Of us must fall, he  
 Or I, I know not which.  
 If I can humble that savage 4150  
 Beast, that cruel villain,  
 Who’s been abusing you,  
 And make him surrender your sons,  
 And then apologize  
 For the shameful words he’s spoken, 4155  
 I’d gladly commend you to God  
 And go about my business.”  
 And so they fetched him his horse,  
 And brought him his weapons, and worked  
 To get him well armored, quickly 4160  
 Equipped for battle, getting him  
 Ready as fast as their hands  
 Could move, without wasting a moment.  
 And when he was armored and ready  
 There was nothing left but to lower 4165  
 The drawbridge and let him ride out.  
 They lowered it, and out he went—  
 But the lion had no intention  
 Of staying behind. All those  
 Who remained in the castle commended 4170  
 Yvain to their Lord’s keeping,

Terribly afraid that the fiend,  
The demon, who'd already killed  
So many good knights in front  
Of their eyes, in that very same place,        4175  
Might be able to do it again.

They prayed to God to keep death  
From Yvain, to return him alive  
And well, and to let him kill  
The giant. So all of them fervently        4180

Prayed to God for what all of them  
Wished. And the giant approached him  
Fiercely, and threatened him, saying:

“By my eyes, whoever sent you  
Out here isn't much of a friend!        4185  
But he couldn't have planned a better  
Way for getting revenge.

Whatever you did to him, or meant to,  
He'll have a perfect revenge.”

But Yvain, who felt no fear,        4190  
Answered: “What a lot of noise!

Do your best, and I'll  
Do mine. Stupid words  
Bore me.” And Yvain charged him,  
Worried that he might be late.        4195

And he aimed his lance at his chest,  
Protected behind a bearskin.

And the giant came running at him,  
Beating at Yvain with his club.

And Yvain struck so hard        4200  
At his chest that he pierced the skin,  
Then having no sauce, dipped  
The tip of his lance in blood.

And the giant beat him with his club  
Till the knight bent to escape him.        4205

Then Yvain drew the sword  
He knew how to swing so well,  
And finding the giant unprotected,

Trusting so much in his strength  
That he scorned the use of armor, 4210  
Went at him with the sharp blade  
And slashed him so well, not bothering  
With the flat side, cut him  
So fiercely, that he sliced a piece  
The size of a steak from his cheek. 4215  
And the giant him so hard  
In return that he bent his head  
Down to the horse's neck.  
And the lion bristled at this blow,  
Ready to help his master, 4220  
Then leaped angrily, powerfully,  
And seized the giant's bearskin  
And ripped and tore it like bark,  
And bit out of his hide  
A chunk of his hip, tore it 4225  
Meat and muscle alike.  
And the giant ran, roaring  
And bellowing like a bull, for the lion  
Had hurt him badly. He lifted  
His club with both hands, and tried 4230  
To strike the lion, but missed,  
For the lion jumped back, and the giant  
Wasted his blow. It hit  
The ground, useless, near  
Yvain, touching neither lion 4235  
Nor man. And quickly Yvain  
Swung at him, and again, and hit him,  
And before the giant knew  
What was happening the sword had severed  
His shoulder from his body. And the very 4240  
Next blow ran the length  
Of the sword just under his chest,  
Straight into the liver. And the giant  
Fell, death reaching out  
To take him. I doubt that a giant 4245



Oak crashing down  
 Could topple with a louder sound.  
 And all those standing on the walls  
 Had been waiting to see that blow.  
 And they learned which of them ran fastest,                      4250  
 For they all came running after  
 The spoils, like dogs at a hunt,  
 Who chase the fox till they catch him.  
 Everyone tried to get  
 To the giant first, there                      4255  
 Where he lay on his face; no one  
 Held back. And the baron ran,  
 And everyone in his court ran,  
 And his daughter ran, and his wife.  
 And the four brothers, who had suffered                      4260  
 So much, were happy. And everyone  
 Knew there was nothing they could do  
 To keep my lord Yvain  
 There, it was perfectly clear,  
 But all the same they begged him                      4265  
 To come back, to celebrate, as soon  
 As he'd done whatever business  
 He was going off to do.  
 And he answered that he wouldn't dare  
 To promise a thing, for how                      4270  
 It might go with him, for good  
 Or for ill, he could not say.  
 But he told his host this much:  
 He and his sons and his daughter  
 Ought to take the dwarf and go                      4275  
 To my lord Gawain, as soon  
 As they've heard that Gawain is home,  
 And tell him the entire tale,  
 Let him know what was done.  
 For what use is kindness, if it's kept                      4280  
 In the dark? It needs to be known.  
 And they said: "It shouldn't be hidden,

This kindness. That wouldn't be right.  
 We'll do exactly exactly as you wish.  
 But tell us, so we can tell him           4285  
 When we stand in front of him, what  
 We can say? How can we praise you,  
 When none of us know your name?"  
 And he answered: "Tell him this much,  
 When you stand in front of him. Tell him           4290  
 That I told you my name was the Knight  
 Of the Lion. And tell him, too,  
 I beg you, that I have asked you  
 To say that he knows me well,  
 As I know him, even           4295  
 If he doesn't know he knows.  
 And say nothing more, I beg you.  
 And now I'm obliged to leave you,  
 And nothing worries me more  
 Than that I may have waited too long,           4300  
 For surely before it turns noon  
 I'll have more than enough to do,  
 If indeed I can get there in time."  
 He started, unwilling to delay.  
 And his host begged him to accept           4305  
 The handsomest gift he could make,  
 And take his four sons with him.  
 Every one of them would try  
 To serve him, if only he'd let them.  
 But wanting no one to ride           4310  
 With him, Yvain left them  
 Standing where they were, and went off.  
 And immediately he headed his horse  
 Straight toward the chapel, spurring him  
 As fast as he could. The road           4315  
 Was both good and straight, and he knew  
 How to keep to the road. But before  
 He could get to the chapel, they'd dragged out  
 The girl and gotten the pyre

Ready, piled up the wood                      4320  
 Where they meant to burn her. Totally  
 Naked, except for her shift,  
 They had her tied where the fire  
 Was lit, accused of a crime  
 That had never crossed her mind.                      4325  
 And then Yvain arrived,  
 And saw her near the fire, where they'd thrown her,  
 And his anger flared, as it should have:  
 Anyone who doubts that knows nothing  
 Of courtesy, and is devoid of wisdom.                      4330  
 He was very, very angry,  
 But also perfectly confident  
 That God and justice would help him,  
 Would fight at his side. He put  
 His trust completely in such comrades,                      4335  
 Though he never forgot the lion.  
 Galloping straight at the crowd  
 He came, shouting: "Release her!  
 Release her, you evil people!  
 There's no justice in burning someone                      4340  
 At the stake who's done nothing—nothing!"  
 And they all pulled back, and made way,  
 And let him approach. And yet  
 What he really wanted to see  
 For himself was she whom his heart                      4345  
 Saw everywhere, wherever she might be.  
 And he looked until he found her,  
 And forced his heart to meet  
 The challenge, held it back, held it in,  
 As one struggles, finding the strength                      4350  
 To curb a bucking horse.  
 And still he stared at her eagerly,  
 Sighing as he watched, but not sighing  
 Quite so hard as he might have,  
 So no one would know who he was.                      4355  
 It was hard, but he stifled his pain.

And an immense pity seized him,  
Hearing and seeing and understanding  
The poor ladies of that court,  
Who were moaning and weeping and crying, 4360

“Oh God! You've forgotten us!  
We'll be left here hopeless, lost,  
If we lose so good a friend,  
So good an adviser, and a helper,  
So useful for all of us at court! 4365

It was her advice that led  
Our lady to give us fine  
New dresses. It will all be different,  
There'll be no one left to speak for us.  
Curses on whoever takes her 4370  
Away! Curses for our loss!

It's going to be awful for us!  
There'll be no one to say and suggest:  
‘This ermine cloak, this coat,  
And this coat, too, my lady, 4375  
That worthy woman should have them!  
Indeed, what a wonderful thing  
It would be to send them to her,  
For she needs them so badly, she does.’  
Who else will say such things? 4380

There's no one as generous, as courteous.  
Everyone else is always  
Asking for herself and not  
For others, though they really need nothing.”

And so they were carrying on, 4385  
And Yvain, standing among them  
And hearing all their complaints,  
Knew they were true, not invented.

And seeing Lunette on her knees,  
Stripped down to her shift, 4390  
Having made her confession and begged  
The Lord to forgive her for her sins,

Make her innocent of all guilt,  
He who had loved her so dearly  
Came toward her, and lifted her up,           4395  
And said: "Oh girl! Where  
Are those who reproach you, who accuse you?  
Here and now, unless  
They refuse it, I offer them battle."  
And she, who had not noticed him,           4400  
Who had not looked up as he came,  
Replied: "Lord! You come  
From God, in my hour of need!  
Those who've sworn false witness  
Are standing here all around me.           4405  
Had you come just a little later  
They'd have burned me to charcoal and cinders.  
And here you are to defend me:  
May God give you the power  
To succeed in exactly the measure           4410  
That I stand innocent of their charges!"  
The steward, and the steward's two brothers,  
Heard these words. "Ha!"  
They cried. "You creature, miser  
Of truth and spendthrift of lies!           4415  
He'd have to be crazy to take on  
Such a burden for anything you'd said.  
And he must be a numbskull, this knight  
Who's come here to die for you.  
There's only one of him           4420  
And three of us. I advise him  
To run before it's too late."  
And Yvain answered, furious:  
"Let anyone run who's afraid!  
I'm not so worried by three shields           4425  
That I'd run from a fight without fighting.  
What sort of knight would I be  
If I let you hold this field  
While I stood healthy and unharmed?"

As long as I'm alive and well 4430  
 I'll never run from your threats.  
 Let me advise you. Pronounce  
 This girl, against whom you've hurled  
 Such slanders, innocent of everything—  
 For she tells me, and I believe her, 4435  
 And she swears to me on her faith  
 And upon her immortal soul  
 That she's never betrayed her lady  
 In word, or in deed, or in thought.  
 I believe every word she's spoken, 4440  
 And I will defend her, if I can.  
 I believe in the justice of her cause.  
 And let this truth be known:  
 Those who stand for justice  
 Stand with God, who is justice 4445  
 And right. And with them at my side  
 I fight with better comrades  
 Beside me than any of you.”  
 Then the steward answered, stupidly,  
 That he'd do what he could to oblige him 4450  
 In everything, to his heart's content,  
 If the lion would leave him alone.  
 And Yvain answered that he hadn't  
 Brought the lion as his champion,  
 And he needed no one's help, 4455  
 But if the lion chose to attack him  
 He'd better defend himself;  
 He could guarantee nothing. And the steward  
 Answered: “Your words mean nothing.  
 Unless you curb your lion 4460  
 And make him stand aside,  
 You'd better not linger here,  
 But leave! It would show good sense,  
 For everyone here in this country  
 Knows she's betrayed her lady, 4465  
 And it's right and just that she have

Her reward in flame and fire.”

“The Holy Spirit prevent it!”

Cried Yvain, who knew the truth.

“May God keep me here           4470

Until I've set her free!”

And he ordered the lion to withdraw,

And stay still, and the lion did

Exactly as his master asked.

The lion was safely to one side,           4475

And all the talking between them

Was done, and they got ready to charge.

The three of them pointed their spears,

But he proceeded at a walk,

Determined not to try           4480

For too much at the very first blow.

He let them splinter their lances,

Keeping his own intact,

Letting them use his shield

As a target. And all of them broke           4485

Their spears. And then he rode off,

An acre or more distant,

Not planning to stay there long.

Galloping straight at the steward           4490

He reached him first, and smashed him

So hard with his lance that he knocked him

To the ground, no matter what he did,

And gave him so stunning a blow

That for a long time he lay there           4495

In a daze, unable to bother him.

Then the other two attacked him,

Swords in their hands, and both

Landed good blows, but got

Better ones back. Each           4500

Of his blows was easily worth

Two of theirs. And so

He defended himself so well

There was no advantage in numbers,  
Until at last the steward           4505  
Rose and did what he could  
To hurt him, and the others tried too,  
Until they began to beat him.  
And the lion, watching all this,  
Thought it was time to help,           4510  
For his master seemed to need it.  
And the ladies, all in one voice,  
Deeply devoted to the girl,  
Called on God to help him  
And prayed with all their hearts           4515  
That nothing might bring defeat  
Or injury or death to him  
Who fought that battle for their friend.  
Having no other weapons,  
The ladies helped with their prayers.           4520  
And the lion brought him different  
Assistance, leaping so fiercely  
At the steward, who was fighting on foot,  
Attacking so furiously that he scattered  
The mail from his armor like so much           4525  
Straw, and seizing him in his jaws  
Dragged him down so viciously  
That he ripped the flesh from his shoulder  
All along his side.  
Whatever he bit at he stripped           4530  
Away, till the guts hung out.  
But the other two paid him back.

And now the battle was even.  
The steward lay dying, death  
At his throat, writhing and rolling           4535  
In the waves of warm red blood  
Flowing out of his body.  
And the lion attacked the others—  
For nothing Yvain could do



Could drive him off, though he hit him 4540  
And threatened him and struggled to do all  
He could. Somehow the lion  
Seemed to know that his master  
Did not truly dislike  
His help, but loved him better 4545  
For it. He charged against them  
Until they had reason to complain,  
And slashed him with their weapons, and hurt him.  
And seeing his lion wounded  
My lord Yvain was angry, 4550  
And with reason, and he took such savage  
Revenge, attacking with such stunning  
Blows that he wore them down,  
Reduced them to feeble nothingness.  
And unable to defend themselves 4555  
They surrendered, crying for mercy.  
The lion's assistance had beaten them,  
But the lion was badly hurt,  
Wounded all over his body,  
With good reason for pain and fear. 4560  
And my lord Yvain himself  
Was hardly in the best of health,  
His body cut and slashed.  
But he worried less for himself  
Than for his suffering lion. 4565  
Now he'd freed the girl,  
Exactly as he meant to, and the lady  
Had pardoned her servant, completely  
And cheerfully. And the fire lit  
For Lunette has burned those 4570  
Who lit it, intending it for her,  
For justice requires that he  
Who has wrongly condemned another  
Should die precisely the death  
He'd meant for a different victim. 4575  
And Lunette was smiling, happy

To be at one with her mistress,  
 Both of them filled with a joy  
 Greater than anyone had ever  
 Felt. And everyone pledged 4580  
 Eternal service to Yvain,  
 Though no one knew who he was,  
 Not even the lady, who already  
 Had his heart without knowing it.  
 And she begged him to stay there for as long 4585  
 As it took for both lion and man  
 To rest and recover. And he said:  
 "Lady! It's out of the question.  
 I could not stay here unless  
 My mistress pardoned me, forgave me, 4590  
 And forgot her anger and displeasure.  
 And that would end my affliction."  
 "Ah," she said, "that upsets me.  
 Anyone who thinks ill of you  
 Can't be a courteous woman. 4595  
 She couldn't shut her door  
 On a knight as worthy as you  
 Unless he'd done her some terrible  
 Wrong." "Lady! However  
 It hurts, it pleases me, if it's what 4600  
 She wants. But no more of that!  
 I'll say nothing of the offense, and nothing  
 Of the punishment, except to those  
 Who already know the whole story."  
 "Does anyone know it, other than 4605  
 You two?" "Oh yes, lady!"  
 "But tell us your name, good sir!  
 Tell us that much, at least!  
 And then you're discharged, you can go."  
 "Discharged, lady? Oh no. 4610  
 I owe more than I could pay.  
 But I owe you at least my name.  
 If anyone speaks of the Knight

Of the Lion they're speaking of me.  
And that is the name I've chosen." 4615

"Before God, good sir! We've never  
Seen you, we've never heard  
That name. What does this mean?"

"Lady! I suppose you ought  
To conclude that I'm not really 4620  
Well known." And the lady replied:

"Still, if it wouldn't displease you,  
I'd like to ask you to stay."

"My lady! How could I dare,  
Not knowing for certain if I'd won 4625  
My mistress' goodwill again?"

"Then go with God, good sir!  
And if it's God's will, may he turn  
Your sorrow and suffering to joy!"

"Lady! I pray that He hears you!" 4630  
Then he whispered, under his breath:  
"Oh lady! you don't know it, but my happiness  
Is locked away in a chest,  
And you carry the key, only you."

And then, suffering immensely, 4635  
He left. And the only one

Who knew him was Lunette, who rode  
A long way at his side. Only  
Lunette went with him, and he begged her  
Over and over not 4640

To let anyone know who  
Her champion had been. "My lord!"  
She said. "I'll never tell."

And then he went on, and asked her  
Not to forget him, and to keep 4645  
A place for him in his lady's heart  
If she had the chance. And she told him  
Not to worry. She could never  
Forget him, nor ever be unfaithful

Or stop trying to help. And he thanked her 4650

A thousand times. And he left her,  
Worried and sad on account  
Of his lion, who had to be carried,  
For he couldn't have followed on foot.  
He'd filled his shield with ferns 4655

And moss, and made it a litter,  
The softest bed he could manage,  
And laid the lion gently  
Down, and carried him, lying  
Full length on the inside of the shield. 4660

And so his horse bore him  
Away, and he came to the door  
Of a handsome house, a strong house.  
The gate was closed, so he called,  
And the porter opened it for him 4665  
So swiftly that he never needed  
To say another word.

And he held out his hand for the reins,  
Saying: "Good sir, come in!  
My lord's house is open to you, 4670  
Should you care to dismount." And Yvain  
Answered: "I'm pleased to accept,  
For this is something I very much  
Need, this offer of shelter."

And so he went through the door 4675  
And saw all the people  
Of that household coming to help him.  
They greeted him, and helped him dismount,  
And laid down his shield, with the lion  
On it, on a stone bench. 4680

And some of them took his horse  
And brought it to a stable, and others  
Took his weapons and his armor,  
Exactly as they ought to. And then  
The lord of that house heard 4685

That he'd come, and as soon as he knew it  
Hurried to the courtyard to greet him.  
And his wife hurried after him,  
And all her sons and daughters,  
And many others, a crowd           4690  
Of all sorts, happy to welcome him.  
And they put him in a quiet room,  
Seeing how sick he seemed,  
And behaved equally well  
By putting his lion in with him.           4695  
And two young girls, daughters  
Of the master of the house, both of them  
Wonderfully skilled in medicine,  
Were put in charge of his cure.  
How many days did he stay there?           4700  
I don't know, but until he  
And his lion were cured and could leave.

But during this time it happened  
That the Lord of Blackthorn was so fiercely           4705  
Attacked by Death that it forced him  
To yield, and he died. And dying  
He left two daughters, and after  
His death the older of the two  
Said that everything he had owned           4710  
On earth was hers, free  
And clear, to have and to hold  
For life, and nothing belonged  
To her sister. And her sister said  
She'd go to King Arthur's court,           4715  
Seeking someone to help her  
Defend her rights. And the older Sister,  
seeing she couldn't  
Prevail without a struggle,  
Was terribly worried and decided           4720  
That if she could she'd get  
To Arthur's court before her.

So she got herself dressed and ready  
And neither delayed nor waited,  
But hurried off to court. 4725  
And the younger sister followed  
As fast as she could, but her journey  
Got her nowhere, for her older  
Sister had already argued  
Her case to my lord Gawain, 4730  
And he had bound himself  
To do as she wished. But they  
Had also agreed that should she  
Tell anyone else what had happened  
He would never defend her again, 4735  
And she had sworn to those terms.

And then the younger sister  
Arrived, wearing a short  
Woolen gown, trimmed  
With fresh ermine. It was just three days 4740  
Since the queen had come back from imprisonment,  
Stolen by Melegant and held  
Along with his other prisoners;  
Only Lancelot had been left  
Behind, treacherously locked 4745  
In a tower. And the day the younger  
Sister came to court  
Was the very same day they heard  
The news of the cruel, evil  
Giant, killed in battle 4750  
By the Knight of the Lion, at whose  
Directions and in whose name  
His nephews had greeted Gawain,  
Telling him the great service  
Done them by that knight, and his great 4755  
Bravery. And his niece told him  
Everything, explaining that he knew  
This knight well, though not his name.

And the younger sister heard  
 All this talk, which left her anxious                      4760  
 And worried, desperate, bewildered—  
 Thinking to herself, what sort  
 Of help could she find at court  
 If all the best knights were away?  
 And more than once she'd approached                      4765  
 My lord Gawain, begging him  
 For love and for charity to help her.  
 And he'd said: "My friend! You're wasting  
 Your time. There's nothing I can do.  
 I've taken on something else,                      4770  
 And I'm not about to leave it."  
 And she left him as quickly as she could  
 And came directly to the king.  
 "Your Majesty!" she said. "I've come  
 To you and your court seeking                      4775  
 Help. I've found none. I'm astonished  
 That no one here will help me.  
 And yet I'd be acting improperly  
 If I left without your permission.  
 For my sister might have known                      4780  
 That love could have gotten her whatever  
 She wanted, anything I owned,  
 But force will never make me  
 Abandon my inheritance, never—  
 If only I can find assistance!"                      4785  
 "You've spoken wisely," said the king.  
 "And while she's here, I advise her,  
 And I beg her, to let you have  
 What is rightly yours." But the older  
 Sister, sure of having                      4790  
 The very best knight in the world,  
 Answered: "My lord! May God  
 Blast me if I'll give her anything  
 I own, a castle or a town  
 Or a forest, or a square of burned land,                      4795

Not even a tree! And if there's  
A knight who'll defend her, though I doubt it,  
Anyone who'll support her right,  
Let him come forward, and now!"  
"Your offer is distinctly improper," 4800  
Said the king. "More time is required.  
According to the judgment of all  
Our courts, she can take as long  
As forty days to find  
A champion." And she answered: "Your Majesty! 4805  
You have the right to proclaim  
The law as it pleases you, and seems right.  
And it's not for me to tell you  
Your right seems wrong. I have  
No choice. I consent to a delay, 4810  
If she demands one." And the younger  
Sister said she definitely  
Wanted a delay. And then  
She commended the king to God  
And left his court, determined 4815  
To hunt all over the world  
For the rest of her life  
For the Knight of the Lion, he  
Who strove to help a woman  
Anywhere who truly needed it. 4820

And so she began her quest,  
And travelled through many countries,  
But heard nothing of him,  
Which caused her such pain that she sickened  
And grew ill. Yet that was lucky, 4825  
For it brought her to a friend's house,  
Where she was dearly loved, and they saw  
At once, looking at her face,  
That her health was not very good.  
And they made her stay, against 4830  
Her will, till she'd told them everything.



And then another young woman  
Took on the journey she'd begun,  
Carrying on her quest.

And so while one woman rested 4835

The other rode the whole day

Long, rode fast, rode alone,

Until the darkness of night

Fell, and she was frightened.

And then frightened still more 4840

When it rained as hard as God

Could make it rain, and she

Was deep in the forest. And the night

And the forest worried her, but worse

Than either the forest or the night— 4845

Far worse—was the rain. And the roads

Became so foul that sometimes

Her horse was almost up

To its belly in mud, which might

Thoroughly frighten any 4850

Young woman alone in a wood,

With no escort, in such weather and on such

A night, so black that she couldn't

See the horse she sat on.

And so she prayed to God, 4855

And then she prayed to His mother,

And then to all the saints

She could think of, a litany of prayers

For God to give her shelter

And get her out of that wood. 4860

She prayed until she heard

A horn, which filled her with joy,

Sure there was shelter to be had

If only she could get to it. She headed

Toward the sound, and came 4865

To a paved road, and that road

Led her directly to the horn

She'd heard blowing in the night,

Sounding three long blasts,  
Loud and high and clear. 4870  
And riding straight toward the sound  
She came to a cross, standing  
Just to the right of the road.  
And she thought that the horn and whoever  
Had blown it must surely be near. 4875  
So she set her horse to galloping,  
And soon she came to a bridge  
And saw the guardhouse and the white  
Walls of a round castle.  
And so, by pure chance, she got 4880  
To the castle, following the sound  
Of the horn, which led her along.  
And that blasting horn had been blown  
By a watchman mounted high  
On the walls, and had caught her ear. 4885  
And as soon as the watchman saw her  
He hailed her, and then came down  
And took the key to the gate  
And opened it, and said: "Welcome,  
Young woman, whoever you are! 4890  
Tonight, your lodging will be good."  
"Tonight, I want nothing else,"  
Said the girl, as he let her in.  
And after all the hardships  
She'd had that day, finding 4895  
Shelter was a stroke of luck,  
For they looked after her well. After  
She'd eaten, her host addressed her,  
Asking where she was going  
And what she hoped to find. 4900  
And then she answered his question:  
"I'm seeking someone I've never  
Seen, I think, and never  
Known. There's a lion with him,  
And they tell me I can truly trust him, 4905

If ever I can find him." "Ah!"

He exclaimed. "I can tell you it's true—

For here in my time of great need

God sent him to me, too.

May they be blessed, whatever 4910

Paths led him to my house!

He took revenge for me on a mortal

Enemy, and made me happy

By killing him in front of my eyes.

Tomorrow, outside that gate, 4915

You can see the body of an immense

Giant, whom he killed so swiftly

That he hardly worked up a sweat."

"For God's sake, sir," cried the girl,

"Can you give me any news, 4920

Have you any idea where he went

Or where he might be staying?"

"Not a thing, as God is my witness!

But tomorrow I can put you on the road

He took when he left here." "And may God," 4925

She answered, "take me anywhere

Where I'll truly hear where he is!

How happy I'll be, if I find him."

And so they spoke a long time

And finally went to bed. 4930

And just as soon as dawn broke

The girl arose, filled

With a deep determination

To find the man she'd been seeking.

And the master of the house rose, 4935

And all his household with him,

And they set her straight on the road

To the spring under the pine tree.

And she rode as hard as she could

Straight toward the castle town 4940

And, coming there, asked the first men

She met if they could give her  
News of the knight and the lion  
Who always travelled about  
Together. And then they told her 4945  
They had seen him fight and defeat  
Three knights at once, right there  
On that very same ground. And she answered  
Them immediately: "Oh God!

Please: tell me everything, 4950  
Now that you've told me so much.  
Hide nothing, tell me what you know!"  
"Nothing," they said. "We know nothing  
Except what we've told you. Whatever's  
Become of him we have no idea. 4955

And if she for whose sake he came here  
Can't give you any news, then no one  
Here possibly could.  
But if you wish to ask her  
Yourself, you haven't far 4960  
To go, for she's come to pray  
To God and hear Mass in that church,  
And she's been inside so long  
That her prayers must have been long ones."

And then, while they were speaking, 4965  
Lunette came out of the church,  
And they said: "There she is!"  
And the girl went to meet her,  
And they greeted each other. And the girl  
Immediately asked for the news 4970

She needed, and Lunette answered  
That as soon as she had a horse  
Saddled and ready, she'd gladly  
Ride with her and bring her  
To an enclosed place where she'd left 4975  
That knight. And the girl thanked her  
With all her heart. The horse

Was quickly saddled and ready  
And Lunette mounted at once.  
And as they rode, Lunette        4980  
Explained how she'd been accused  
And called a traitor, and the pyre  
Had been heaped and lit, and they'd meant  
To put her in and burn her,  
And the knight had come to help her,        4985  
Just when she needed him most.  
And as she spoke she led her  
Along, and brought her directly  
To the road where she'd left Yvain.  
And having taken her so far,        4990  
She said: "Follow this road  
Until you come to some place  
Where, if it pleases God  
And the Holy Ghost, you'll hear  
Truer news than I        4995  
Can tell you. I remember leaving him  
Right here, or very nearly  
Here, but I've not seen him  
Since then, and what he's done  
I don't know. I know that when        5000  
I left him he was wounded and needed  
Help. I send you after him:  
God grant that you find him healed,  
If that be His will, today  
Or tomorrow! Go! I commend you        5005  
To God. I can follow no farther,  
Or my lady might be angry."  
And so they left each other,  
Lunette to go home and the girl  
To go on alone until        5010  
She came to the house where Yvain  
Had stayed and recovered his health.  
She saw people in front of the gate,  
Knights, and ladies, and squires,

And the lord of that house, and she greeted 5015  
 Them all and asked them to tell her  
 Anything they could, whatever  
 They might know, of a knight she was seeking,  
 A knight she needed to find.  
 "Who?" they asked. "He 5020  
 Who travels with a lion, they tell me."  
 "Good Lord, girl!" said the lord,  
 "He left us just now. You might  
 Be able to catch him, if you know  
 How to follow his tracks and you're careful 5025  
 Not to waste any time!"  
 "My lord!" she said. "God forbid!  
 Just tell me in what direction  
 I should go!" And they told her: "That way,  
 Right straight ahead," and they asked her 5030  
 To give him their greetings. But their words  
 Meant precious little to her.  
 She paid them no attention,  
 But immediately set off at a gallop.  
 To her the pace seemed terribly 5035  
 Slow, although her horse  
 Galloped very well.  
 And she galloped through muddy fields  
 Just as she galloped when the road  
 Was level, until she saw him, 5040  
 He and his lion together.  
 And she cried out, happily: "Help me,  
 Oh Lord! I finally see him,  
 After hunting and searching so long.  
 But suppose I hunt but don't win, 5045  
 What good will it be if I catch him?  
 Oh Lord, for nothing, nothing!  
 If I cannot get him to join me,  
 All my trouble will be wasted."  
 So saying, she hurried ahead, 5050  
 And her horse was dripping with sweat,

And she came where he was and greeted him.

And he answered her at once:

“God keep you, pretty one! and guard you  
From worry and care!” “And the same 5055

To you, my lord, who I hope  
Will be able to free me from such things!”

Then she drew her horse near his

And said: “My lord! I've sought you  
All over. The fame you've earned 5060

Has led me to hunt you, all wearily,  
Over many, many countries.

I've sought you so long that, God  
Be thanked, I've finally found you.

And none of the misfortunes I've endured, 5065  
None of the afflictions, are worth

Talking about or remembering.  
It's vanished, my limbs are lightened,

Sorrow stole away  
The moment I met you. Yet none 5070

Of this is my own necessity.

I come to you from a woman  
Better than myself, nobler

And braver. And if you fail her,  
It will be your fame that betrayed her, 5075

For she has no one else to help.  
This lady, deprived of her entire

Inheritance by her sister, hopes  
To win her suit through you.

You're the only one she wants. 5080  
Nothing could ever persuade her

That anyone else could help.  
You'll win the love of this friendless,

Cheated woman, and vastly  
Increase your renown, if you win her 5085

Back what is rightfully hers!

She herself would have sought you,  
Hoping for this kindness, and no one

Could have taken her place, except  
That illness has kept her away,           5090  
Forced her to take to her bed.  
Now tell me, please, if you dare  
To come as she asks, or if  
You'll choose to say no and do nothing."  
"No," he answered, "saying           5095  
No wins no man fame.  
No more will I say no,  
But follow you, sweet friend!  
Gladly, wherever you please.  
And if she for whom you've sought me           5100  
Truly needs me, have  
No fear. Anything I'm able  
To do for her, I'll do.  
May God give me the grace  
And the great good luck to win her           5105  
Back what is rightly hers!"

So riding along, side  
By side, and chatting, they approached  
The Castle of Infinite Misfortune.  
They had no interest in passing           5110  
It by, for the sun was setting.  
So they rode up to the castle,  
And the people who saw them come  
Shouted and yelled at the knight:  
"Curses on your coming, curses!           5115  
Whoever showed you this lodging  
Meant to harm you, and shame you.  
An abbot could swear it's the truth."  
"You foolish, vulgar people,"  
He answered, "filled with evil           5120  
And utterly empty of good,  
Why attack me like this?"  
"Why? Oh, you'll find out,  
If you go a little bit farther.



But you can't find out here: 5125  
 You'll have to go in there,  
 You'll have to enter that castle."  
 And at once he started toward the tower,  
 And all the people shouted,  
 All of them, at the top of their lungs: 5130  
 "Don't look for trouble! Where are you  
 Going? If you've ever known anyone  
 Who's harmed you, and shamed you, that's  
 What they'll do, there where you're headed,  
 And you'll never live to tell it." 5135  
 "You shameless, wicked people,"  
 Answered Yvain, hearing them,  
 "Insolent, wretched: have you any  
 Reason for attacking me? What  
 Are you asking for, what is it you want? 5140  
 Why are you muttering at my heels?"  
 "My friend! There's no reason for anger,"  
 Said a lady well on in years,  
 Plainly sensible and polite.  
 "Surely, there's no harm in their words. 5145  
 They're only trying to warn you,  
 If only you'd try to understand,  
 That you ought not seek shelter there.  
 But they dare not tell you why.  
 They're simply warning and scolding, 5150  
 Trying to make you afraid.  
 They do this for every stranger,  
 All the time, to keep them  
 From ever entering the castle.  
 And it's also our custom never 5155  
 To dare give lodging or shelter  
 To any noble gentleman,  
 To no one who comes here from anywhere  
 Else. It's up to you.  
 No one will stop you from going. 5160  
 Go up, if you choose to—but my

Advice is: turn back.” “Lady!”

He said. “I suspect there is honor

And sense in your words, if only

I were able to do as you say. 5165

But I've no idea where else

I might find lodging for tonight.”

“Dear me!” she said. “I'll be still.

It's really none of my business.

Go wherever you please! 5170

Still, I'd be more than happy

To see you come back from in there

Not too much disgraced. But that

Is simply too much to expect.”

“Lady!” he answered. “May God 5175

Be your saviour! But my foolish heart

Leads me on, and I obey my heart.”

And he went straight up to the gate,

He and his lion and the girl.

And then the porter called out, 5180

Saying: “Quick! Quick!

You're coming to a place that will well

And truly lock you up:

And may your coming be cursed!”

And after greeting him this way 5185

The porter hurried on up,

But the greeting was deeply insulting.

Yet my lord Yvain said nothing,

And went right on, and found

A great high hall, brand new, 5190

With a walled courtyard in front of it,

And a wall of great sharpened stakes,

And inside, behind the stakes,

He saw three hundred girls

All sewing away, some working 5195

With golden thread, some silk,

Working as hard as they could.

But their wretched poverty was such  
That they sat there bareheaded, many  
So poor that they wore no sash, 5200  
And their dresses were torn at the breast  
And out at the elbows, and their shifts  
Were dirty around the neck.  
And their necks were thin, and their faces  
Pale with hunger and misery. 5205  
He saw them, and they saw him,  
And they bowed their heads, and they wept,  
And for a long, long time did not move,  
Knowing there was nothing to be done,  
Unable to raise their eyes 5210  
From the ground, so bent with sorrow.  
And after watching them a while  
My lord Yvain turned  
And headed back toward the gate,  
And the porter jumped in front of him 5215  
And cried: "You're wasting your time:  
There's no way out, good sir!  
You'd rather be out than in,  
But by my head it's no use!  
First you'll have your fill 5220  
Of disgrace—more than you'll think  
You can bear. It wasn't terribly  
Intelligent, coming in here,  
For now there's no way out."  
"Good brother, I've no wish to leave! 5225  
But tell me, by your father's soul:  
These ladies I see in the courtyard,  
Weaving cloth of silk  
And brocade, where are they from?  
Their work is excellent, it pleases me, 5230  
But it makes me distinctly unhappy  
To see how their faces and their bodies  
Are so thin and pale and wretched.  
It seems to me they'd be graceful

And lovely, if they had the sort                    5235  
Of things they'd like to have.”  
“And I will tell you nothing,”  
He said. “Find someone else!”  
“I shall, since I've nothing better.”  
And then he looked for the door                    5240  
Of that courtyard where the girls were working,  
And went in among them, and greeted  
Them all, and saw tears  
Falling from their eyes, streaming  
Down from their eyes, all of them                    5245  
Sitting and weeping together.  
And he said: “May it please our Lord  
That this sorrow, whatever it comes from,  
Be taken from your hearts and turned  
Into joy!” And one of them answered:                    5250  
“May the God you've prayed to hear you!  
Nor will we conceal who  
We are and where we're from.  
I assume that is your request?”  
“That,” he said, “is why                    5255  
I came here.” “My lord! Long ago  
The King of the Island of Virgins  
Went hunting gossip and stories  
In many courts and in many  
Countries, travelling like a fool                    5260  
Till he stumbled across this dangerous  
Place. What an unlucky hour!  
For the shame and misery we've known,  
We miserable prisoners that you see,  
Was nothing we'd ever deserved.                    5265  
And believe me, you can expect  
Exactly the same for yourself,  
If they won't let you be ransomed!  
But be all that as it may,  
Our king came to this castle,                    5270  
Owned by two sons of the devil—

And that's not nonsense, believe me!  
They'd been born of a woman and a demon.  
And these two were ready to fight  
With the king, who was frightened silly,           5275  
For he was barely eighteen  
And they could have cut him in half  
Like a soft and juicy lamb.  
So the king, consumed with terror,  
Escaped as best he was able,           5280  
Swearing that every year  
He'd send them thirty young girls,  
While the agreement lasted. And paying  
This tribute set him free.  
And the terms he swore to provided           5285  
That this tribute should last as long  
As this pair of demons lived,  
Except that on the day  
They were beaten in battle the tribute  
Should end for ever, and all           5290  
Of us would be freed, who now  
Are bound to live in shame  
And sadness and misery. None of us  
Will ever know pleasure again.  
For I spoke like a child and a fool,           5295  
Speaking as I did of freedom.  
None of us will ever leave.  
We'll spend our days weaving  
Silk, and wearing rags.  
We'll spend our days poor           5300  
And naked and hungry and thirsty,  
For they'll never pay us what we earn,  
Let us buy better food.  
We've only a bit of bread,  
Some in the morning and less           5305  
At night. Our work doesn't pay  
Any of us even as much  
As four pennies in a single day.

And that's not enough to feed us  
 Or put clothes on our backs. Even           5310  
 Earning twenty sous  
 A week, we're still miserable,  
 We never escape it. It's true:  
 There isn't one of us here  
 Who doesn't earn twenty or more—           5315  
 And that's as rich as a duke!  
 And yet we're miserably poor,  
 And the ones we work for are rich  
 Because of what we produce.  
 We work most nights, and we work           5320  
 All day, just to stay alive,  
 For they threaten to cut off our arms  
 And legs if we rest. No one  
 Dares to rest. But why  
 Go on telling you these things?           5325  
 We've so much misery and shame  
 I couldn't tell you a fifth of it.  
 And what makes us wild with grief  
 Is seeing the death of so many  
 Rich and worthy knights,           5330  
 Who come to fight these demons.  
 Their lodging is exceedingly costly,  
 As yours will be, tomorrow,  
 For whether you like it or not  
 You'll have to fight them, alone           5335  
 And singlehanded, fight  
 And then lose your fame to those demons."  
 "May God, who is heavenly truth,  
 Protect," said my lord Yvain,  
 "And give you back honor and joy,           5340  
 If so He wishes it to be!  
 But now I'm obliged to go see  
 The people who live in this castle,  
 And find out how they'll receive me."  
 "Go then, my lord! May He keep you,           5345

Who bestows all goodness and blessings!”

And then he went to the hall  
And found no one, good or evil,  
Who could say a word. So they went  
All through the house, till they found           5350  
Themselves in a garden. No one  
Had ever spoken of stabling  
Their horses: not a word had been said.  
Did it matter? They were very well stabled  
By those who thought they now owned them.           5355  
It's not my place to judge:  
The horses' owners were still healthy  
And well. But the horses had oats  
And hay and straw right up  
To their bellies. And Yvain went into           5360  
The garden, and the girl and the lion  
Went after him. And he saw a gentleman,  
Propped up on his elbow, lying  
On a silken cloth, and a girl  
Was reading him from some romance,           5365  
I have no idea about whom.  
And in order to hear this romance  
A lady had come to lie there  
With them. She was the girl's  
Mother, and the gentleman her father.           5370  
And both of them were right to rejoice  
At seeing her and hearing her read,  
For she was their only child,  
Not yet quite seventeen  
And so beautiful, graceful, and lovely           5375  
That the God of Love would have bound  
Himself to her service, if he'd seen her,  
And never let her fall  
In love with anyone but him.  
And he would have become a man,           5380  
And set aside his godhood,

And struck his own body with that dart  
Whose wound never heals  
(Unless some unfaithful doctor  
Cures it). But no one should ever           5385  
Be cured, except by unfaithfulness.  
And anyone cured by anything  
Different was never truly  
In love. I could tell you so much  
Of this wound, if you wanted to listen,           5390  
That I couldn't finish my story  
Today. But there'd surely be someone  
Saying I was talking nonsense,  
For people are no longer lovers,  
And can't love as they used to love,           5395  
And don't want to hear it talked of.  
So listen, now, and hear  
How Yvain was welcomed, what greeting  
He got, and how it was given.  
Everyone there in that garden           5400  
Leaped to their feet when they saw him.  
As soon as they saw him they cried  
With one voice: "This way, good sir!  
Whatever blessings God  
Can pronounce or bestow, may they come           5405  
To you and anyone you love!"  
I haven't the faintest idea  
If they lied, but they welcomed him happily  
And seemed to be pleased that he  
Could be lodged with them, and lodged well.           5410  
Even the lord's daughter  
Served him with honor, behaving  
As one should to a worthy guest.  
She helped him off with his armor,  
Nor was that the least she did,           5415  
For she washed his face and his neck  
With her very own hands. And the lord  
Of the house insisted that every



Honor be shown him, and so  
It was. She took a pleated           5420  
Shirt from her storage chest,  
And white stockings, and a needle  
And thread to sew on the sleeves,  
And did so. He was dressed: God keep  
This service from becoming too costly!           5425  
And she gave him a good coat  
To wear over his shirt,  
And a red furred cloak, fashionably  
Cut, to wrap round his neck,  
And was so attentive in every           5430  
Way that he grew embarrassed.  
But the girl was so open and courteous,  
So plainly kind and good,  
That she thought she had done very little.  
And further, she knew perfectly           5435  
Well that her mother wished nothing  
Undone that might possibly please him.  
That night they brought him so much  
To eat that he could not eat everything.  
The men at arms who carried           5440  
The dishes must have been angry.  
And at bedtime they served him with such  
High honor that he lay down in comfort,  
And no one dared to come near him  
Once he had taken to his bed.           5445  
The lion lay at his feet,  
As he always did. And in  
The morning, when God lit up  
His light, for the world to see with,  
Yvain got out of bed           5450  
As quickly and quietly and early  
As he could, without disturbing  
The household, and he and the girl  
Went to the chapel and heard  
Mass, which the priest said           5455

At once, to the Holy Ghost's honor.

And after the Mass my lord  
Yvain was given bad news,  
Thinking the time had come  
To leave, and nothing would stop him. 5460  
But it did not go as he wished.  
He said to his host: "Lord,  
I shall leave you, with your permission."  
And the lord of the house answered:  
"My friend! I cannot grant it, 5465  
Not yet. And I have a reason.  
An exceedingly cruel and devilish  
Rule prevails in this castle,  
And I am obliged to uphold it.  
I shall call two of my soldiers, 5470  
Great strapping fellows, and strong,  
And right or wrong, you  
Are obliged to fight them both.  
If you can fight them off,  
If you can defeat and kill them, 5475  
My daughter wants you as a husband,  
And this castle, and all the lands  
And honors that go with it, will be yours."  
"Lord!" said Yvain. "It's not  
What I wish. God will not give her 5480  
To me, she will stay with you,  
For she is beautiful enough,  
And good, and well bred, that the Emperor  
Of Germany would do well to win her!"  
"Be still, my dear guest!" said his host. 5485  
"There's no point to listening to you speak,  
For there's nothing you can do to escape.  
Whoever can defeat these two,  
Who are shortly going to attack you,  
Will have my castle, and my daughter 5490  
As his wife, and all my lands.

The battle will take place;  
Nothing in the world can prevent it.  
But I do understand why  
You refuse my daughter. It's cowardice. 5495  
You think it will let you out  
Of the battle. Nonsense. Believe me,  
Sir, nothing will get you  
Out of it, for this battle must be!  
No knight who takes lodging here 5500  
Can ever escape it. This  
Is our custom, and a settled rule  
I expect will last a long time,  
For my daughter will never be married  
Until they're conquered, or dead." 5505  
"In which case I'm obliged to fight them,  
In spite of myself. And yet,  
I assure you, I'd gladly forgo  
This battle. I regret it. But let  
It be, since it can't be helped." 5510  
And then two black, hideous  
Sons of the devil came in,  
And all their weapons were a pair  
Of jagged dogwood clubs,  
Made ready for war with a covering 5515  
Of copper and wound around  
With brass. Their armor extended  
From the shoulders all the way  
To their knees, but their heads  
And faces were bare. And their legs, 5520  
Not particularly slender  
Or weak, were also bare.  
And ready for war they came at him,  
Holding in front of their faces  
Light, strong shields. 5525  
And then the lion began  
To quiver, seeing them. He knew  
Perfectly well that the weapons

They were carrying were meant to be used  
 Against his lord and master. 5530  
 His hair stood up, his mane  
 Bristled, and he shook with anger  
 And beat the ground with his tail,  
 Ready and eager to save  
 His master, before they could kill him. 5535  
 And seeing the lion, they said:  
 "Knight! That lion is threatening  
 Us. Get him away.  
 Surrender, here and now,  
 Or else you've got to put him 5540  
 Somewhere where he can't join  
 In this fight, either by helping  
 You or injuring us.  
 We play this game by ourselves!  
 That lion would be very glad 5545  
 To help you, if we let him."  
 "Take him away yourselves,  
 If he frightens you!" declared Yvain.  
 "It would suit me perfectly well  
 If he hurt you as much as he could. 5550  
 I'd much appreciate his help."  
 "By God!" they exclaimed. "It won't do.  
 You're not having help from him.  
 You've got to do your best  
 Alone, without assistance! 5555  
 It's only you against us.  
 If that lion fights at your side,  
 If that lion attacks us, it won't  
 Be simply you against us,  
 But two against two. Do 5560  
 As we tell you. Your lion has got  
 To be put away, and now,  
 And whether you like it or not."  
 "And where," said he, "should I put him?  
 Where would you like him to be?" 5565

So they showed him a tiny room,  
 And said: "Lock him in there!"  
 "Exactly as you wish," said Yvain.  
 And he led him in and locked  
 The door. And they brought Yvain           5570  
 His weapons and body armor,  
 And led out his horse and handed him  
 The reins, and Yvain mounted.  
 Sure of their safety from the lion,  
 Locked away in that room,           5575  
 The two devilish champions  
 Came forward, determined to harm him  
 And shame him. They hit him hard  
 With their clubs, and his shield and helmet  
 Weren't much help. When they smashed           5580  
 Away at his helmet, it was quickly  
 Dented, and began to crack,  
 And his shield splintered like a mirror:  
 They battered such holes that a fist  
 Could have shoved right through them.           5585  
 They were truly after him, those two.  
 And what did Yvain do  
 To those devils? Fear and shame  
 Drove him to fight with all  
 His strength. Fired up and struggling,           5590  
 He dealt them crashing blows,  
 Returning presents as good  
 As he'd gotten, doubling their kindness.  
 And the lion, locked in his room,  
 Was troubled and sad at heart,           5595  
 Remembering Yvain's goodness,  
 And his generous help, and knowing  
 How badly the knight needed  
 His lion's help, and now  
 He could pay him back in full measure,           5600  
 Even double and redouble his kindness,  
 Leaving no debt unpaid,

If only he could get himself out.  
He searched in every corner  
And found nothing, no way                      5605  
Of escaping. And hearing how fierce  
And desperate and dangerous the battle  
Had become, his sorrow drove him  
Mad with despair. Hunting  
Again and again, he found                      5610  
That near the ground the threshold  
Was rotting, and he clawed at it, and squeezed  
Partly through. But his back  
Wedged in, and stuck. And Yvain  
Was weary and sweating hard,                      5615  
Finding the two assassins  
Tough and strong and dangerous.  
He'd taken many blows,  
And returned as many as he could,  
And they still came at him, unharmed.                      5620  
They were skilled, experienced fighters,  
And their shields weren't the sort  
That any sword could cut through,  
No matter how hard or how sharp.  
Yvain was very well                      5625  
Aware that they might kill him,  
But he managed to hold his own  
Until the lion got out,  
Clawing under the threshold.  
And now those fiends could be beaten—                      5630  
Or never at all. There'd be  
No truce between them and the lion  
For as long as he saw them still living.  
He leaped on one and dragged him  
To the ground like a sack of wheat.                      5635  
Both the demons were terrified,  
But no one else in that place  
Could keep from rejoicing. When the lion  
Had him down, nothing

Could put him back on his feet                    5640  
Unless the other one helped him.  
And he ran to assist him, carefully  
Guarding himself, worried  
That the lion would turn on him  
As soon as he'd killed the one                    5645  
He'd thrown to the ground. He was far more  
Afraid of the lion than the lion's  
Master. But Yvain would  
Have been out of his mind, once the fellow  
Turned his back, and his neck                    5650  
Was nicely exposed and available,  
If he'd let him live much longer.  
Things were working out well.  
Seeing that bare head  
And naked neck, he gave him                    5655  
Such a stroke with his sword  
That the head was so smoothly sliced  
Off the shoulders that its owner never  
Knew it. And now he dismounted,  
Wanting to rescue the other one                    5660  
From the lion's jaws. In vain:  
He'd been injured so badly that no doctor  
Could ever help him. The lion  
Had charged so furiously, so wildly,  
That his wounds were terrible. As soon                    5665  
As Yvain had pushed the lion  
Off, he could see that the shoulder  
Had been ripped completely away  
From the body. But nothing he saw  
Made Yvain feel sorry. The club                    5670  
Had fallen from his hand, and he lay  
On the ground, almost a corpse,  
Unable to move or fight.  
But still, he was able to speak,  
And he said, as well as he could:                    5675  
"Take away your lion, good sir!

Don't let him hurt me any more.  
 For now you can do with me  
 Exactly as you please, and anyone  
 Who begs for mercy must always           5680  
 Be granted it whenever it's asked for,  
 Unless the victor is a man  
 Without pity. I can't defend myself—  
 Indeed, I can't even rise  
 And leave this place, unaided.           5685  
 I surrender myself to your mercy.”  
 “You admit defeat,” asked Yvain,  
 “Concede that you're conquered and beaten?”  
 “Lord: that seems to be obvious.  
 In spite of myself, I've been beaten.           5690  
 I freely concede defeat.”  
 “Then you've nothing to fear from me,  
 And my lion, too, grants you  
 Your safety.” Then they rushed to Yvain,  
 Everyone crowding around him,           5695  
 And the lord and his lady both  
 Embraced him, and rejoiced, and spoke  
 Of their daughter, telling him:  
 “And now you shall be lord  
 And master of us all, and our daughter           5700  
 Will be your lady. We give you  
 Our daughter as your wife.” “And I,”  
 He replied, “give her back.  
 Who has her, should keep her! It's none  
 Of my business. I speak without scorn.           5705  
 Don't be distressed because  
 I refuse her. I cannot take her,  
 I must not. But give me, please,  
 The girls you're holding captive!  
 The agreement so stipulates, and it's time,           5710  
 As you know, that they must be freed.”  
 “You're right,” he said, “that's true,  
 And I hand them over. They're yours.



There's nothing to argue about.  
 But you'd also do well to take 5715  
 My daughter, and all my wealth,  
 For she's beautiful, and noble, and wise!  
 You're hardly likely to find  
 Another marriage as rich  
 As this one." "Lord! My legal 5720  
 Obligations, and all my affairs,  
 Are unknown to you. I dare not explain.  
 But understand this: what I  
 Refuse would never be declined  
 By anyone who could follow his heart 5725  
 And accept so lovely and noble  
 A girl, receive her freely,  
 As I would do, were I free  
 To take this one or any other.  
 But I can't. Believe me, I can't. 5730  
 Allow me to leave you in peace!  
 For the lady awaits me, she  
 Who came here with me. She  
 And I have travelled long  
 And far, and I wish to stand by her, 5735  
 Whatever the future may bring me."  
 "Leave, good sir? But how?  
 Never, unless I command it,  
 And it's my decision not to.  
 For you, my gates are not open. 5740  
 No. You'll stay here, my prisoner.  
 You're arrogant, sir, and unjust,  
 When I beg you to take my daughter  
 And you scorn her, disdain her." "Scorn her,  
 Lord? Not so, by my soul! 5745  
 Whatever it costs me, I cannot  
 Remain, and I cannot marry.  
 I must follow the lady who leads me:  
 Everything else is impossible.  
 But believe me, I can pledge you with this 5750

My right hand, as sure as you see me  
Now, that I shall return,  
If ever I can, and be glad  
To accept your daughter, if  
And when you think it right.” 5755  
“Anyone be damned who asks you  
For your pledge, or your faith, or your promise!  
If my daughter pleased you, you'd be back here  
Quickly enough. No oath  
And no pledge would bring you back 5760  
Any sooner, by God. Go, then!  
I release you from all your promises  
And all your agreements. Whatever  
May keep you away, wind  
Or rain or nothing at all, 5765  
I don't care. Could I think so poorly  
Of my daughter that I'd force you to have her?  
Now go and do what you need to!  
It's all the same to me  
Whether you go or you stay.” 5770

And Yvain turned quickly away  
And stayed no longer in that castle.  
And he led away with him  
Those miserable wretches, now free,  
Poor, and dressed in rags, 5775  
That the lord had given to his custody.  
How rich they felt themselves,  
All of them leaving that castle,  
Filing out in pairs.  
And I think they'd have felt no greater 5780  
Joy if He who made them,  
He who made the whole world,  
Had descended from heaven to earth.  
And all the people who'd insulted him  
And shamed him, as much as they'd been able, 5785  
Now begged his forgiveness, and for peace,

And sought to escort him on his way.  
And he answered that their words meant nothing.  
“I don't understand what you're saying,”  
He said. “There's nothing to be settled,                    5790  
As between us. I can't recall  
Any unpleasant words.”  
This pleased them immensely, and all of them  
Loudly praised his courtesy,  
And having taken him a long way                    5795  
Along on his road, commended him  
To God. And the girls he'd freed  
Asked his permission to leave.  
As they said their farewell they bowed  
And prayed for him, hoping God                    5800  
Would grant him joy and health  
And whatever his heart wished for,  
Wherever he might choose to go.  
Not wanting to linger, he replied  
That he hoped God would save                    5805  
Them all. “Go!” he said.  
“May God bring you home happy  
And safe!” So off they went  
On their way, journeying joyfully  
—And Yvain immediately hurried                    5810  
In the opposite direction, riding  
As fast as he could, never  
Stopping, going as the girl  
Directed, seven days in the week.  
She knew the road exceedingly                    5815  
Well, and knew the refuge  
Where she'd left the afflicted, disconsolate  
Woman who'd lost her inheritance.  
And yet when she heard the news  
That the girl was back, and with her                    5820  
The Knight of the Lion, there'd never  
Been such joy as her heart  
Felt, convinced that now,

If she pressed her case, her older  
 Sister would surely concede her                    5825  
 Some share of their father's estate.  
 She'd been ill a very long time,  
 And was just risen from her sickbed,  
 But the illness had been long and hard  
 And had seriously harmed her, as anyone                    5830  
 Could see, looking at her face.  
 At their first meeting she went  
 Directly out to welcome them,  
 Greeting them and showing them honor  
 In every way she could.                    5835  
 There's no need to speak  
 Of the joy in the house, that night.  
 To do more than mention it would prolong  
 My story to no purpose. Permit me  
 To pass over it and go to the following                    5840  
 Day, when they mounted their horses  
 And left. And they rode till they saw  
 The castle where King Arthur had been staying  
 For several weeks or more.  
 And the lady who'd disinherited                    5845  
 Her sister was there, staying  
 Near the court, awaiting  
 Her sister's arrival, which was closer  
 Than she could have known. But it made  
 No difference to her, for she thought                    5850  
 The younger woman would never  
 Find anyone able  
 To stand up to Gawain in battle,  
 And only a single day  
 Of the forty were left to her. The inheritance                    5855  
 Would have been hers alone,  
 Legally absolute,  
 In justice and according to the king's  
 Judgment, had that day gone by.  
 But more stood in her way                    5860

Than she could have known or believed.

They slept that night outside  
The castle town, in a small,  
Poor house, where no one knew them,  
For had they stayed at the castle        5865  
Everyone would have known them,  
And they were careful to keep that from happening.  
As soon as dawn broke they had  
To leave, of course, but they hid  
Themselves, concealing their presence        5870  
Till the sun was high and bright.

I can't tell you how many  
Days had gone by since Gawain  
Vanished, and no one at court  
Had any idea where he was,        5875  
Except the lady he was bound  
To fight for. He'd slipped away,  
Three or even four leagues  
From court, and when he returned  
He'd equipped himself so that no one        5880  
Could ever have known him, though they'd seen  
And heard him every day:  
His weapons and armor were so different.  
And the lady, whose wrongful conduct  
Toward her sister was clearly apparent,        5885  
Brought him to court in the sight  
Of all, intending to use him  
To prevail in a dispute where she had  
No right. "Your Majesty!" she said.  
"Time passes. Noon will soon        5890  
Be gone, and today's the last day.  
You see how I'm ready to assert  
My rights. If my sister meant  
To return, we'd have no choice  
But to await her coming. But I'm thankful        5895

To God on high that she's never  
Coming back. Plainly,  
She can't do better than she's done,  
And all her effort's been wasted.  
As for me, I've always been ready— 5900  
Down to this very last moment—  
To defend what's rightly mine.  
I've won my claim without fighting,  
And now it's mine, and I'll go  
And enjoy my inheritance in peace. 5905  
I've no need at all to answer  
To my sister, not for the rest  
Of my life. She can live miserably,  
And in sorrow." And the king, knowing  
Quite well that the lady was grossly 5910  
Unfair and disloyal to her sister,  
Answered: "My friend! In a royal  
Court one waits, by God,  
As long as the king's justice  
Thinks proper for reaching a verdict. 5915  
There'll be nothing fast and loose:  
It seems to me there's still  
Plenty of time for your sister  
To come." And as he spoke  
The king saw the Knight 5920  
Of the Lion, and the girl with him.  
They'd come ahead, those two,  
Stealing away from the lion,  
Who'd remained at their lodging.

And seeing the younger sister, 5925  
Whom of course he knew, he was very  
Pleased, and even delighted,  
That she'd come in time, for he held  
Her side of the quarrel, because  
He respected justice and right. 5930  
And he spoke of his pleasure, as soon

As he found himself able: "Come forward,  
Pretty one! May God save you!"  
When the other heard him, she started,  
And turned, and saw the knight           5935  
Her sister had brought with her  
To fight for her rights, and her face  
Became blacker than the blackest earth.  
But everyone welcomed the younger  
Sister, who went to the king           5940  
And stood before his chair,  
And standing in front of him, said:  
"God save the king and his court!  
Your majesty! If any knight  
Can defend my rights and establish       5945  
My claims, this knight will accomplish it.  
He has followed me here only  
Out of pity for my plight. He has much  
To occupy him, elsewhere, this gracious,  
Generous courtier of high birth.       5950  
But he felt so sorry for me  
That he's put aside his other  
Concerns in favor of mine.  
My dear sister, whom I love  
As I love myself, would do       5955  
The right and courteous thing  
If she let me have what was mine,  
Only what was mine, and made peace  
Between us. I want nothing that's hers."  
"And I," said the other, "want nothing       5960  
That's yours, for that's what you have  
And will have. No preaching will do it,  
For preaching will get you nothing.  
May your sadness dry you to dust."  
And the other, who knew how       5965  
To be pleasant, and was wise as well  
As courteous, answered at once:  
"Surely," she said, "it saddens me

That two knights the like of these  
Should fight because of us, 5970  
And because of so slight a quarrel.  
But I can't give up my rights;  
My need is far too great.  
It would show far more goodwill  
If you simply gave me what I deserve." 5975  
"Hah!" said the other. "Anyone  
Who listened to you would be stupid.  
May I burn in the fires of hell  
If I give you anything for your comfort!  
The banks of the Seine will come 5980  
Together, and morning will be noon,  
If I don't make you do battle."  
"May God, in whom I trust  
And have trusted all the days of my life,  
And trust now, and the right, which is mine, 5985  
Give their help to him  
Who for charity and noble generosity  
Has put himself at my service,  
Though he does not know me and I  
Know neither his name nor him." 5990

So they talked till their words had ended,  
And then they led their knights  
To the middle of the court. And everyone  
Came running to see them, as people  
Usually come running when they want 5995  
To see a fight up close,  
And watch the blows. But those  
Who were soon to fight could not  
Recognize each other, though they'd always  
Loved one another dearly. 6000  
Did they love one another now?  
I could answer you "Yes" or "No,"  
And either one would be right,  
As I shall proceed to prove.



Truly, Gawain loved            6005  
Yvain, and thought him his friend,  
As Yvain thought him, had he known  
Who he was. Even here, had he known him,  
He'd have shown him honor and respect.  
He'd have laid down his life for him,            6010  
As Gawain would have done for Yvain,  
Rather than harm his friend.  
Could love be more perfect or finer?  
Not a bit. But their hate, on the other  
Hand, was just as obvious.            6015  
Indeed: it's perfectly clear  
That one would have broken the other's  
Head, and cheerfully, and tried  
To do his best to do  
The worst he could to disgrace him.            6020  
Incredible! What an absolute marvel,  
Love and mortal Hate  
Found in a single basket.  
God! How can two things  
So utterly unlike find            6025  
Themselves at home together?  
Impossible, it seems to me:  
They could not share the same roof,  
And if they tried living  
Together, there'd surely be quarreling            6030  
And commotion, as soon as each  
Knew the other was there.  
And yet the house could have many  
Rooms, bedrooms, and galleries,  
And it might well be like that:            6035  
I suppose Love could hide  
In some out-of-the-way room, and Hate  
Go up on balconies hung  
Over highways and streets, choosing  
To exhibit herself in public.            6040  
Hate has her bow ready

To shoot, and she sits in the saddle  
 And gallops at Love as hard  
 As she can, and Love doesn't move.  
 Love! Where are you hiding? 6045  
 Come out! See what an ally  
 Your friends' enemies have led  
 To the field, to battle against you.  
 These very same men are those enemies,  
 Loving each other with a saintly 6050  
 Love, for Love's never false,  
 But a precious thing, and holy.  
 But Love's gone totally blind,  
 And Hate's no better off.  
 If Love had had any idea 6055  
 Just who they were, he would have  
 Forbidden them to harm each other,  
 To do anything dangerous or hurtful.  
 So love is blind, but more  
 Than blind, disconsolate and deluded: 6060  
 Even seeing them straight on  
 He can't tell which ones are his.  
 And Hate hasn't a notion  
 Why either should hate the other,  
 But he wants to set them at odds, 6065  
 Make each one hate with a mortal  
 Hate. And, of course, no one  
 Can love a man he longs  
 To disgrace and wants to kill.  
 What then? Is Yvain determined 6070  
 To kill Gawain, his friend?  
 Yes, and Gawain the same.  
 Would Gawain want to kill  
 Yvain with his very own hands,  
 Or perhaps do worse things still? 6075  
 Not really: I swear it, on oath.  
 Neither would really want  
 To injure or shame the other,

Not for everything God has done  
For man, not for all the wealth           6080  
Of Rome. But of course I'm lying.  
Clearly, as anyone could see,  
They were ready to attack each other,  
Lances high and ready,  
Prepared to slash at each other,           6085  
To do all the damage they could,  
And nothing held back. Now tell me:  
Whoever gets the worst of it,  
Whichever one is beaten  
In battle, who can he blame?           6090  
It worries me, for I'm quite convinced  
If they come to blows they'll never  
Stop their struggling and fighting  
Till someone has won a victory.  
Would Yvain be able to say,           6095  
If he were the one who lost,  
That he'd been hurt and disgraced  
By someone who calls him his friend,  
Someone who never mentions  
His name except in friendship?           6100  
And suppose it went the other  
Way, and Yvain did the harm,  
Would Gawain, who'd then be defeated,  
Be able to complain of his friend?  
Hardly: he wouldn't know who did it.           6105  
But neither knew the other,  
And so they drew back, and made ready.  
Their lances shattered, when they met,  
Good lances, made out of ash wood.  
Not a word was spoken, for had           6110  
They exchanged as much as a single  
Word, they'd have met quite differently.  
Then, there'd have been no blows  
From spears or swords, but arms  
Would be wound in embraces, and kisses           6115

Given, instead of wounds.

And now they went at it for real.

Their swords were hardly improved,  
Nor their helmets, nor their shields, all badly  
Dented, and split, and their sharpened 6120  
Blades chipped and notched,

And considerably blunted, for they struck  
At each other, not with the flat  
Of their weapons, but the deadly blades,  
And they hacked so hard at the other's 6125  
Neck, and nose-guard, and forehead,  
And cheeks, that both were purple  
And discolored, there under

The skin where the blood had clotted.  
And their long coats of mail were torn, 6130  
And their shields so broken up  
That both of them were wounded.  
And they fought so hard, and so fiercely,  
That both were panting and short  
Of breath, as the battle went on. 6135

Every jewel set  
In their helmets was crushed to powder,  
Smashed to bits, as the blows  
Crashed on their heads, both of them 6140  
Stunned, their brains nearly beaten  
Out. Their eyes sparkled

As with massive, heavy fists  
And powerful muscles, and strong  
Bones, they swung at each other 6145  
As long as their hands could hold  
Their swords, useful tools  
For the sort of damage they were doing.

Weary, after a long time,  
Their helmets battered in, 6150  
Their linked mail-coats coming  
Apart from the fierce sword strokes,

Their shields split and half shattered,  
 They drew back a bit,  
 Letting their blood cool            6155  
 And trying to recover their breath.  
 But not for very long.  
 And then they fell on each other  
 Even more furiously than before.  
 And everyone said that two            6160  
 More courageous knights had never  
 Existed. "This is no game.  
 These two are fighting in earnest.  
 But how could they ever be paid  
 What they're worth, and what they deserve?"            6165  
 And the two friends who were fighting  
 Heard these words, and heard  
 How courtiers were trying to make peace  
 Between the two sisters, but in vain,  
 For the older sister wanted            6170  
 No part of any peace.  
 The younger one said she'd leave it  
 To the king, and accept his judgment,  
 Not quibbling whatever he decided,  
 But the older was so malicious            6175  
 That even Queen Guinevere  
 And all the knights and the king  
 And the ladies and all the townsfolk  
 Began to favor the younger,  
 And went to the king, and begged him            6180  
 To give her at least a third  
 Or a fourth of their father's estate,  
 In spite of the older one's claim,  
 And asked him to part the two knights,  
 Who had shown such wonderful courage.            6185  
 What a shame it would be, they declared,  
 If either were seriously hurt  
 Or deprived of any honor.  
 But the king said that peace

Was not for him to establish;                    6190  
The older sister spurned it,  
For her spirit was mean. And everything  
They said was heard by both  
Knights, who had gone on fighting  
So savagely that everyone marvelled,                    6195  
For the battle had gone so evenly  
That no one could possibly have said  
Who was winner or loser.  
And even the two who were fighting,  
Earning honor with martyrdom,                    6200  
Were astonished and unable to grasp it,  
For they fought on such equal terms  
That each one found it miraculous  
For anyone to stand against him  
So fiercely and long and well.                    6205  
They fought so exceedingly long  
That day began to turn night,  
And each of them fought with weary  
Arms and wretched body,  
And their overheated blood                    6210  
Boiled out of many wounds  
And ran down their mail-coats.  
No wonder they both wanted  
To rest: they had fought magnificently.  
So each of them rested a bit,                    6215  
Thinking to himself that at last  
He'd met his match, no matter  
How long he'd waited to find it.  
They rested longer than they meant to,  
Not daring to begin again.                    6220  
Fighting no longer interested them,  
As much for the growing darkness  
As for the fear they felt for each other.  
Both things kept them apart  
And urged them to preserve their new peace.                    6225  
But before they left that field

They'd find out just who they were,  
And both would be happy, and sorry.

Yvain was the first to speak,  
Brave and courteous as he was.           6230  
But even his friend couldn't tell  
It was him, for his voice was weak,  
And his words could barely be heard,  
Hoarse, and feeble, and low.

All the blows he'd received           6235  
Had badly shaken him. "Lord!"  
He began. "Night approaches.  
No one, I think, will blame  
Or reproach us if darkness keeps us  
Apart. And I will admit           6240  
That I fear and value you immensely.

Never in all my life  
Have I fought so painful a battle,  
Nor have I ever seen  
A knight I so much wanted           6245  
To know. You know how to strike  
Your blows, and you use them well.  
No knight I've ever known  
Can fight so punishingly. I had no  
Desire to spend this day           6250  
Experiencing the blows you've given me.  
You've half addled my head."

"Good lord!" Gawain answered.  
"You're no more exhausted and stunned  
Than I am, and perhaps even less.           6255  
And if I knew you, knight,  
I hope you'd not be displeased.

And indeed, if I've given you anything  
You've paid me back in full,  
Principal and interest too.           6260  
You were readier to pay me in kind  
Than I was anxious to receive it.

But let that be as it will.

And since you've asked me to tell you

The name I go by, I'll not            6265

Keep it hidden. My name

Is Gawain, son of King Lot.”

As soon as Yvain heard him

He was bewildered and deeply disturbed.

Wild with rage, he threw            6270

His blood-covered sword to the ground,

And then his cracked and shattered

Shield after it, and dismounted

From his horse, and approaching on foot

He cried: “Dear God! What bad luck!            6275

What kind of stupid mistake

Brought on this battle, neither

Of us knowing the other.

Had I known who you were, nothing

Could have made me fight with you.            6280

Believe me, I'd have surrendered to you

And never struck a blow.”

“What?” Gawain exclaimed.

“Who are you?” “I am Yvain,

Who loves you better than anyone            6285

In the world, however far

It may stretch, for everywhere we've been

You've always loved me, and honored me.

And I wish to do you such honor,

And make you such amends, in this business,            6290

That I declare myself defeated.”

“You'd do so much for me?”

Said my sweet lord Gawain.

“How insolent I'd be, how presumptuous,

To accept what you'd give me so freely.            6295

No such honor shall be mine.

It belongs to you, it's yours.”

“Never, good sir! Never!

How could I possibly accept it?



I can't continue. I'm utterly                    6300  
Defeated, my wounds are too serious.”  
“Never let that worry you!”  
Cried his friend and companion.  
“It's I who've been conquered and beaten.  
And there's no flattery in my words.                    6305  
There's no stranger, anywhere in the world,  
To whom I'd not say as much,  
Rather than endure more fighting.”  
And as he spoke he dismounted,  
And each embraced the other,                    6310  
And kissed the other, their arms  
Around each other's necks,  
Each continuing to insist  
That he'd lost. They were arguing away  
When the king and all the barons                    6315  
Came running from all around them,  
Seeing them reconciled,  
All of them anxious to hear  
How it had happened, and who  
Were these happily embracing knights.                    6320  
“Gentlemen!” said the king. “Tell us,  
Please, how you've come to such friendship  
And understanding, after  
A day filled with such hatred  
And incredible combat!” And Gawain,                    6325  
His nephew, answered the king:  
“Your majesty! Nothing will be kept from you,  
Neither the exceeding bad luck  
Nor the misfortune that brought us  
This battle. And since you've bothered                    6330  
To approach us, seeking to know  
The truth, you shall surely hear it.  
I, Gawain, your nephew,  
Did not know my friend and companion,  
My lord Yvain, who this is,                    6335  
Until, by the gracious mercy

Of God, he asked me my name.  
And we told each other our names,  
And knew each other at last,  
But only after we'd fought. 6340  
We fought well. Had  
Our combat gone on just  
A little longer, surely  
It would have gone badly for me,  
For by my head he'd have killed me, 6345  
Both because of his skill  
And because of the wrong I was chosen  
To fight for. I'd rather my friends  
Beat me in battle than killed me.”  
Then Yvain's blood was up, 6350  
And he answered at once: “My dear  
Friend! So help me God,  
Everything you've said is wrong.  
The king, our lord, should know  
That without a doubt I 6355  
Am the one who was beaten in this combat!”  
“No, I.” “No, I,” they kept saying,  
Both so noble and generous  
That they passed the victory and the crown  
Back and forth, neither of them 6360  
Willing to accept it, each of them  
Trying as hard as he could  
To convince the king and the court  
That he was the one who'd been beaten.  
But after listening a bit, 6365  
The king ended their quarrel,  
Wonderfully pleased by what  
He had heard and seen that day,  
And seeing them embracing each other,  
Though before they'd hurt and wounded 6370  
Each other all over their bodies.  
“Gentlemen!” he declared. “You two  
Love one another. And you show it,

Each one insisting he was beaten.

Now leave all this to me! 6375

I think I can arrange it all

So neatly that you'll both be honored,

And the world will praise my solution."

Both of them promised to do

Whatever he directed, exactly 6380

As he might order. And then

The king said he'd settle the quarrel

Fairly and also in good faith.

"Where," he asked, "is the lady

Who forcefully drove her sister 6385

From her lands, and disinherited her

By force and evil intent?"

"Lord!" she said. "I am here."

"You're there? Then come here! I saw

From the very beginning that you 6390

Were disinheriting her.

Her rights will not be denied:

You've just admitted the truth.

Now give her back what's hers:

You have no choice." "My lord!" 6395

She said. "If I spoke like a fool,

If I answered you like a simpleton,

You shouldn't take me literally.

Good God, your Majesty! Don't harm me!

You're a king, you ought to be careful 6400

About doing wrong and injustice."

"Exactly," said the king, "why I choose

To render justice to your sister.

It's not my custom to be unjust.

And surely you've heard how both 6405

Your knight and hers have left

Everything to my mercy. What

I shall say will not entirely

Please you, but everyone knows

You are wrong. Each knight claims 6410

Defeat, to honor the other one.  
I've nothing to say about that.  
Since everything's been left to me,  
You will do exactly as I order  
And in every single respect, 6415  
Without objection, or I proclaim  
My nephew beaten at arms.  
Nothing could be worse for you,  
And I'd contradict my own heart."  
In fact, he'd never have said it, 6420  
But he spoke in order to frighten her,  
And to see if anything could frighten her  
And oblige her, because of her fear,  
To give back her sister's inheritance.  
He was well and truly aware 6425  
That nothing he could say would make her  
Give back a thing, and only  
Force or fear could oblige her.  
And she was afraid, and cried out,  
And said: "Good lord! I'm obliged 6430  
To do precisely as you wish,  
Though it grieves me, it breaks my heart.  
But I'll do it, however it hurts,  
And my sister will have what's hers.  
And as pledge that she'll have her share 6435  
Of our inheritance, I name you,  
So she'll know it will truly be done."  
"Then give it to her at once!"  
Said the king, "and let her acknowledge  
You as her lady, and honor you! 6440  
Love her as you'd love anyone  
Who serves you, and let her love you  
As her lady and her older sister!"  
And so the king arranged it,  
And the girl took possession of her lands 6445  
And offered him her gratitude. And then  
The king spoke to his nephew,

That brave and valiant knight,  
And asked that he let them disarm him,  
And spoke to Yvain, and asked        6450  
If he'd mind doing the same,  
For now weapons and armor  
Weren't needed. They laid down their arms,  
And left the field as equals.  
And then, taking off their armor,        6455  
They saw the lion come running,  
Searching everywhere for his master.  
And as soon as he saw Yvain  
He showed how happy he was.  
The crowds melted away;        6460  
Even the bravest left.  
"All of you, stay!" cried Yvain.  
"Why run? No one is chasing you.  
Don't be afraid that that lion  
Has any intention of hurting you!        6465  
Please, believe me: he's mine,  
As I am his. We two  
Are companions, he and I."  
Then all of them knew it was true,  
As they'd heard it told, that this        6470  
And no one else was the knight,  
And also the lion, of whom  
It was said that together they'd killed  
The cruel giant. And my lord  
Gawain said to Yvain:        6475  
"My friend, so help me God,  
You've thoroughly shamed me, today!  
How terribly badly I've paid  
You back for the service you rendered me,  
Killing that giant and saving        6480  
My nephews, and saving my niece.  
I've thought a great deal about you,  
Of late, and always with pain,  
For everyone said we were friends

Who loved one another. I've thought 6485

Long, and I've thought hard,  
And I never could understand,  
For I'd never heard any talk  
Of a knight I had known, anywhere  
On earth, anywhere I'd been, 6490  
Whose name was the Knight of the Lion.  
I knew no one who used that name."

They removed their armor as they spoke,  
And the lion came hurrying up  
Toward his master, seated there, 6495  
And as soon as he stood in front of him  
Greeted him as a dumb beast can.

Then both knights had to be brought  
To a sick room, for both of them needed  
To have their wounds healed 6500

By a master surgeon and his plasters.  
King Arthur, who loved them both,  
Arranged it all. He sent for  
A surgeon, who knew the science  
Of healing wounds better 6505  
Than anyone on earth. And the surgeon  
Made it his business to care for them  
Until, in the shortest time possible,  
All of their wounds had been healed.

And then, when both were cured, 6510  
My lord Yvain, whose heart  
Was irrevocably set on love,  
Saw clearly that he could not go on  
But would have to die for love,  
Unless his lady had mercy 6515  
On him. He would die for her.

And he thought it best to leave  
The court, all alone, and go  
To her magic spring, and create  
Such a storm of lightning and thunder, 6520

And such howling winds, and such rain,  
That force and necessity would make her  
Seek peace with him, or else  
The spring would never be able  
To stop churning out winds            6525  
And rain and lightning and storms.

And as soon as Yvain felt strong  
Again, cured of his wounds,  
He left, and no one knew it.  
But the lion went with him, who meant            6530  
For the rest of his life never  
To leave his companion's side.

They rode till they saw the spring,  
And Yvain made the winds and the rain.  
Don't think I'm a liar, please,            6535

When I tell you he made a storm  
So violent that no one could tell you  
A tenth of it. It seemed that the earth  
Would open and the whole wood fall in.  
And the lady worried for her castle,            6540  
For it seemed that it too might crumble:  
The walls shook, and the towers  
Trembled as if ready to topple.

The bravest Turk alive  
Would choose a Persian jail            6545  
Rather than stay in those walls.

And all her people were terrified,  
And cursed their ancestors, and said:

"Curses on the man who built  
The first house in this country, and anyone            6550  
And everyone who founded this town!

You couldn't find a more  
Disgusting place anywhere  
In the world. One man can invade us,  
And torment us, and cause us such trouble."            6555

"My lady," said Lunette,

“You need to seek help! Nor  
Are you likely to find anyone  
Who'll help you, now that you need it,  
Unless you seek it far off.           6560  
I can see we'll never be safe  
In this castle, we'll never dare  
Go near the walls or through  
The gate. You know your soldiers!  
If you brought together all           6565  
Your knights, there isn't one  
Who'd dare come forward, not even  
The very best of them! This  
Is the problem: if there's no one to protect  
Your spring, you'll be despised, made fun of.           6570  
You'd win eternal honor,  
Wouldn't you, if whoever attacks you  
Gets off without a battle!  
This is a desperate situation,  
Unless you've made some better           6575  
Plan.” “You're wise,” said the lady.  
“Tell me what I can plan on,  
And I'll do whatever you say.”  
“Lady! I would if I could.  
I'd gladly help and advise you.           6580  
But you need, and need most desperately,  
Someone wiser than I am.  
I don't dare interfere.  
I shall endure this wind  
And these rains with everyone else,           6585  
Waiting, if God wills, till I see  
Some brave man come  
To your court, who'll assume the burden  
Of this battle on your behalf.  
I don't believe it will happen           6590  
Today. We've not seen the worst.”  
But the lady answered at once:  
“Girl! Talk of something different!



Don't tell me about my people,  
For all I expect from them           6595  
Is nothing. None of them dare  
Defend the spring and the stone.  
But, may it please God, let me  
Hear your advice and your wisdom.  
Everyone says that necessity           6600  
Is always friendship's best test."  
"My lady! If anyone thought  
He could find the man who killed  
The giant, and conquered three knights,  
It would be well to go and seek him.           6605  
But you heard him. As long as he bears  
His lady's ill will, and her anger,  
I suspect there's no one on earth  
He'd follow, neither woman nor man,  
Until someone swore on oath           6610  
That they'd do everything they could  
To end her displeasure, so bitter  
And such a burden to him  
That he's dying of sorrow and pain."  
And the lady said: "Before           6615  
You start on this quest: I'm ready  
To swear, and I swear, and you have  
My word, if he'll come to me here,  
Without deception or deceit  
I'll do everything I can           6620  
To bring about this peace."  
Then Lunette replied: "Lady!  
It won't be easy. You may wish  
To do it, it may please you to try,  
But it's bound to be difficult. Still,           6625  
If this is your pleasure, and you wish it,  
I can take your oath before  
I start on my journey." And the lady  
Said: "I have no objection."  
Lunette, who was always courteous,           6630

Immediately brought her an immensely  
Precious holy relic,  
And the lady fell to her knees.  
And in all sobriety and courtesy  
Lunette accepted that deceptive 6635  
Oath. She was careful, administering it,  
To omit nothing that might  
Turn out to be useful. "Lady!"  
She said. "Raise your hand!

I want you not to accuse me 6640  
Of anything, after tomorrow.  
You're doing nothing for me.  
You're doing this for yourself.  
Now swear, if you please, that in order  
To help the Knight of the Lion 6645  
You propose to exert yourself  
In any way you can,  
Until he has his lady's

Love again, as completely  
As ever." The lady raised 6650  
Her right hand, and declared: "I swear it,  
Exactly as you've said: and I say,  
May God and this holy saint  
Help me and keep my heart  
From failing; let me do all I can. 6655  
If I have the strength, and I can,  
I'll help him return to the love  
And the grace he once knew with his lady."

Lunette had done her work well.  
There was nothing she'd wanted as badly 6660  
As this, and now she'd done it.  
A horse with an easy gait  
Was already ready. Feeling  
Cheerful, with a smile on her face,  
She mounted and rode off, then found 6665  
Under the pine tree, the man

She'd hardly expected to find  
Without riding a great deal farther.  
She'd thought it would be distinctly  
A longer and harder journey. 6670  
She recognized the lion,  
Then Yvain, as soon as she saw them,  
And galloped directly toward them,  
And dismounted, and stood on the ground.  
And Yvain had known her as soon 6675  
As he saw her, even far off,  
And greeted her. And she greeted him,  
Saying: "My lord, I'm delighted  
To find you so near at hand."  
And my lord Yvain answered: 6680  
"Why? Were you looking for me?"  
"Yes! And I've never been so pleased  
Since the day I was born. And this  
Is what I've gotten my lady  
To do—unless she perjured 6685  
Herself: as soon as she can  
She'll be your lady and you  
Her husband. I'm telling you the truth."  
My lord Yvain was delighted  
To hear such news; he'd never 6690  
Expected to hear it. He couldn't  
Stop thanking Lunette  
For having accomplished it. He kissed  
Her eyes, and then her face,  
And said: "Oh, my sweet friend! 6695  
How could I ever repay you,  
What could I possibly do?  
There'll never be time enough  
To honor and serve you as I'd like."  
"My lord!" she said. "It's not 6700  
Important. Don't give it a thought!  
You'll have time enough and to spare  
For helping me—and others.

If I've paid this debt, which I owed you,  
Then you owe me no more           6705  
Acknowledgment than anyone who borrows  
Anything and later returns it.  
Nor do I think, still,  
That I've truly repaid you what I owe."  
"You have, as I stand in God's sight,           6710  
Five hundred thousand times over.  
And now, if you're ready, let us go.  
But what have you told her? Does she know  
My name?" "No, by my faith!  
The only name she knows           6715  
For you is the Knight of the Lion."

And so they chatted as they rode  
Along, the lion behind them,  
Until they came to the castle.  
And they spoke not a word to anyone,           6720  
Neither to a man or a woman,  
Until they stood in the lady's  
Presence. And the lady couldn't  
Have been happier, hearing the news  
That the girl was coming and bringing           6725  
With her both the lion  
And his knight. She longed to see him  
Again, and come to know him.  
And my lord Yvain, dressed  
In full armor, helmet and visor           6730  
And all, fell at her feet,  
And Lunette, standing next to him,  
Exclaimed: "My lady, raise him,  
And use your best wisdom and all  
Your power to bring him peace           6735  
And a pardon, as no one else  
In the world could possibly do!"  
So the lady asked him to stand,  
And said: "Anything I can do

I will do! If I possibly can           6740  
I wish to procure him what he asks for.”  
“My lady! I shouldn't say it,”  
Said Lunette, “if it weren't true.  
But it's even more possible, and within  
Your power, than I've told you. But now           6745  
I'll tell you everything, and you'll see  
How truly I spoke. You've never  
Had so good and loyal  
A friend as this man here.  
God Himself, who wishes           6750  
For peace and love between you,  
Love and peace unending,  
Led me to find him, today.  
And to prove how rightly I speak  
All I need to say is:           6755  
My lady! Forget your anger!  
His only mistress is you.  
This is Yvain, your husband.”

The lady trembled at these words,  
And said: “May God save me!           6760  
You've hooked me beautifully, haven't you?  
You'll make me love him in spite  
Of myself, though he neither loves  
Nor respects me. A fine bit of business!  
You've served me remarkably well!           6765  
I'd rather spend my life  
Buffeted by storms and wind!  
And if breaking an oath weren't low  
And villainous and ugly, I'd never  
In all this world come to terms           6770  
With him, or give him any peace.  
It would have burned inside me,  
Like a hidden fire smouldering  
Under cinders—but I have to make peace,  
So I wish to speak of it no more,           6775

Nor ever mention it again.”

And Yvain heard, and understood  
That things were going well,  
That he'd have his peace and forgiveness,  
So he said: “Lady! We ought       6780  
To show pity to sinners. I've had  
To suffer for my folly, and I ought  
To have suffered, it was only right.  
It was folly that kept me away;  
I was guilty, you were right to punish me.       6785  
It's taken courage to come  
And stand before you. I've risked it.  
But now, if you'll take me back,  
I shall never injure you again.”  
“Surely,” she said, “I'll consent.       6790  
If I didn't do everything in my power  
To bring peace between us, I'd be guilty  
Of perjury. And now, if you wish it,  
I grant you your request.”  
“Lady!” he exclaimed. “A thousand       6795  
Thanks! The Holy Spirit  
And even God Himself  
Couldn't make me happier than that!”

And now Yvain had his peace,  
And surely, believe me, nothing       6800  
Had ever pleased him better,  
However miserable he had been.  
It had all come right in the end.  
His lady loved him again,  
And cherished him, and he cherished her.       6805  
He'd forgotten all his worries,  
Wiped away by the joy  
He felt with his dear sweet love.  
And Lunette was vastly relieved:  
Nothing she'd wanted was denied her,       6810

Now that she'd fashioned an unbreakable  
Peace between generous lord  
Yvain and his one true love.

So ends The Knight of the Lion,  
A story told by Chrétien,        6815  
For nothing more's been heard of it,  
And no one will ever tell more—  
Unless he feels like lying.

## Afterword

Joseph J. Duggan

Chrétien de Troyes wrote in the second half of the twelfth century. What little we know about him comes from the prologue to his romance *Cligés*, where he identifies himself as the author of six other works: *Erec and Enid*; a tale about King Mark and Isolt the Blonde; adaptations into Old French of Ovid's *Art of Love* and *Remedies of Love*; two stories from that same author's *Metamorphoses*—"Philomène," probably preserved as part of the thirteenth-century *Ovide moralisé*, and the lost "Bite on the Shoulder," perhaps a version of the story of Pelops.

That Chrétien was schooled in Latin is certain, and he may well have been a clerk in at least minor orders. The other romances ascribed to him with assurance, namely *Yvain*, *Lancelot (The Knight of the Cart)*, and *Perceval (The Tale of the Grail)*, are assumed to have been written after *Cligés*. Both *Lancelot* and *Perceval* are unfinished, the first because for some reason Chrétien gave it over to another writer, Gode-froy of Lagny, to complete, and the second probably because he died before bringing it to a conclusion. *Erec and Enid* is thought to have been written around 1170 and *Perceval* in the decade before 1191, the year in which Phillip of Flanders, the poem's patron, died. Most scholars also take that year to mark the latest possible date of Chrétien's poetic activity. *Yvain* was probably composed around 1177, either shortly after or shortly before *Lancelot*. Another romance by a writer named Chrétien *Guillaume d'Angleterre*, is sometimes assigned to Chrétien de Troyes, but the attribution is dubious. Two of Chrétien de Troyes' love poems have, however, survived.

The town of Troyes, located southeast of Paris, was in the Middle Ages the residence of the count and countess of Champagne and the site of a very important fair to which merchants from all over Europe came annually to sell their wares. Working in such a cosmopolitan center, at a court frequented by Andrew the Chaplain (author of that astonishing treatise known as "The Art of Courtly Love"), the poet Conon of Béthune, the romancer Gautier of Arras, the chronicler Villehardouin, the epic poet Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, and many other authors, must have exposed Chrétien to a multitude of



influences. Marie, countess of Champagne, under whose guidance and patronage he wrote *Lancelot*, was the daughter of King Louis VII of France and Eleanor of Aquitaine. After her divorce from Louis, Eleanor had married the young Henry Plantagenet, who shortly thereafter succeeded to the throne of England as Henry II. Although we are particularly ill-informed about the relationship between Marie and her mother, this link with the British Isles may ultimately be responsible for the Celtic background of Chrétien's romances.

*Yvain* is such an entertaining story that it is easy to overlook its moral tenor. From the opening lines, Chrétien invokes the Arthurian milieu as an exemplary world capable of teaching values to his contemporaries, and he contrasts the way people loved in his own period with the ways in which love flourished in King Arthur's day. For him the "modern" age does not come off well in the comparison. Always looking for a way to justify his own pursuits as a writer—a commonplace among medieval authors—he asserts that it is better to speak of those endowed with true courtly virtues, even if they be dead, than to waste one's time on uncouth contemporaries. The emphasis on characters as models of conduct leads one to understand that the story of *Yvain's* adventures has more than mere entertainment value. For

Words can come to the ear  
Like blowing wind, and neither  
Stop nor remain, just passing  
By, like fleeting time,  
If hearts and minds aren't awake,  
Aren't ready and willing to receive them.

[11. 157-62]

In fact, although the hero manages to win out in the end over the hostility of Sir Kay, the prowess of Gawain, his own wife's quite justifiable anger, and various preternatural forces, his demeanor in the early sections of the romance is by no means unblemished. Indeed, beginning with his furtive departure from Arthur's court, his behavior is initially quite problematic.

*Yvain's* purpose in seeking out the fountain that had been the occasion of Calgrenant's shame is praiseworthy in itself, since he wants to avenge his cousin. But to call the latter a fool and then set off against Kay's advice, without taking leave of the king or telling any of his companions where he is going—without *any* public revelation of his actions, in fact—is conduct that hardly qualifies as

courtly. That he does not want to request from King Arthur the right to challenge the knight of the fountain, for fear of losing the opportunity to Kay or Gawain, does not justify his stealing off, especially in a society in which openness of conduct was a guarantee of its probity. Defending himself against the knight of the fountain is a legitimate act, but he only pursues the wounded Esclados to his castle in order to procure evidence that will satisfy Calgrenant and Kay, an impetuous decision that leads to his confinement between the sliding blade and the gate, in an enclosure that Chrétien compares tellingly to

a trap

Set for a rat when he comes  
Hunting what was never his.

[11. 913-15]

That the charming and clever Lunette saves the hero is, on the other hand, a gesture in repayment of his courtesy on a previous occasion when he alone had helped her at court. This long first section of the romance takes Yvain from King Arthur's entourage to Laudine's castle, where the royal court eventually comes to him. It also serves to familiarize the reader with Yvain's courage, physical abilities, and temperament. This prepares us for the testing of his moral character in the conflict between loyalty to Laudine and the allurements of knightly fame, as Gawain entices him to depart on a prolonged series of tournaments. The two courtly heroes are so successful that they attract more and better knights than Arthur himself has done, inducing the king to come to their court rather than to await their attendance at his. Yvain's forgetfulness and haughtiness at this stage fall into the same category as his lack of courtesy in slipping away from court: it is the conduct not of a bad character but of a self-indulgent one, lacking at times in the concern for the feelings of others that lies at the root of courtliness.

Yvain begins to redeem himself only in the second part of the tale, after the terrible ordeal in which he loses his senses, tears off his clothes, and lives as a wild man in the forest—the hermit his only contact with civilization. In order fully to appreciate the significance of this crisis, one has to remember that in the Middle Ages the deep woods were not an inviting place of repose from the hubbub of town life. Rather, they were considered primarily as threatening, the locus of encounter with savage beasts and with creatures that we nowadays consider fantastic and legendary but which for medieval society were very real. To minds accustomed to thinking of both nature and human

actions as representative of some hidden and higher reality, the stripping of the accouterments of ordinary social life from Yvain must have symbolized a radical transformation—not just physical and, as we would say today, psychological, but spiritual and moral—an external manifestation of his shame. When those trappings are restored to him by the lady of Noroison's servant, who applies to his body perhaps a little too eagerly the unguent whose ultimate source is Morgan le Fay, he is quite meaningfully a new man, no longer the Yvain of old whose reputation was destroyed by his public shame, but as it were a man without renown, with a new name to make for himself.

That name presents itself to him in the guise of the lion, a sensitive beast human enough in its capabilities to attempt suicide when it thinks its master is dead. The lion's unalloyed fidelity acts as an antidote to the selfish lack of concern for others whose consequences drove Yvain to madness. The beast's moral characteristics immediately begin to rub off on his master. With each of the major adventures in the second half of the romance—the struggle against Count Alier, the defense of Lunette against her three accusers, the defeat of Harpin of the Mountain, the combat with the “sons of the devil” in the Castle of Infinite Misfortune—Yvain builds another reputation, but always under the new name of “Knight of the Lion.” When he finally rejoins Arthur's court he is for the king's entourage another person entirely, only to be identified as Yvain when he reveals himself to Gawain, but at that point already marked as one of the greatest of knights because he has proven himself to be Gawain's equal in combat. Yvain starts, then, from relative mediocrity as an untested and unpolished knight, rises in stature as the successful suitor of a rich widow, then fails through his own un-courtly behavior. After performing a series of exploits—alone, then in the company of the lion—he finally triumphs, fighting Gawain to a draw without the lion's help amid the general admiration of Arthur's courtiers, the ultimate judges of chivalric worth. It is noteworthy that the deeds he performs after the balm has taken effect are progressively more disinterested. He first helps the lady of Noroison, to whom he is indebted for his recovery, then the relatives of his close friend Gawain, and finally Lunette, who is only in her predicament because of his own failure to return to Laudine at the appointed time. But in the Castle of Infinite Misfortune he liberates captives to whom he owes nothing, and his defense of the younger daughter of the lord of Blackthorn is undertaken “for charity and noble generosity,” in spite of the fact that he does not know the woman and she does not know him (11. 5987-90).

But what about Laudine of Landuc? This much-tried lady loses two husbands in the course of the romance, although one eventually comes back to her under what might not seem to be the most desirable of circumstances. The gradual reversal of her initial feelings for Yvain is a miniature masterpiece of storytelling. The art of weaving a good tale had never died out during the hiatus between the decline of Roman civilization and the revival of learning that began to gather force in the twelfth century. But psychological analysis was practically unknown in narratives of the early Middle Ages. In the earliest extant romances, written in France in the mid-twelfth century, authors had to grapple with the problem of representing the workings of the human personality, a process of exploration that ran parallel to renewed interest in the psyche. Chrétien, who as far as we know was the first poet to write romances about King Arthur, exploited the innovations of his predecessors in depicting the complexities of Laudine's sentiments. The internal dialogue in which she debates whether to admit that Yvain might have had some justification in mortally wounding Esclados shows her taking the part of both accuser and defendant and coming to the conclusion she had wished to reach in any case,

And all the time igniting  
Herself, like smoking wood,  
Bursting into flame when it's stirred,  
Smouldering if no one blows it  
Awake.

[11. 1777-81]

The transformation is orchestrated by the resourceful Lunette, who pays for her daring but is still there at the end, restored to favor and up to her old deceptions. Just as Lunette maneuvered her mistress into a position in which she would be receptive to Yvain's attentions, despite the fact that he had given her husband his death blow, so here she tricks Laudine into saying that she will procure for the "Knight of the Lion," whom Laudine does not recognize as her offending husband, all that he asks for.

But in her mythic past Chrétien's courtly character Laudine, lady of the fountain and bestower of the magic ring of invulnerability, was in all likelihood no simple mortal. There is virtually universal agreement that somewhere in the tradition from which Chrétien took many of the elements of his tale, Laudine was a fairy and her kingdom an Otherworld realm. One of the ways that travelers enter the

Otherworld in folklore and romance is through water, and the fountain, its wonders, and the test to which they give rise are no doubt the frontier between two existences—a frontier that Calgrenant failed to merit crossing. Lunette too, with her ring of invisibility, was once a helper-fairy, although in Chrétien's tale her character, like that of Laudine, is much more complex.

Yvain, whose role corresponds to that of the mortal held captive by the fairy so that he might defend her kingdom against intruders, has rich antecedents in the history of northern Britain and in the traditional literature, folklore, and mythology of the Celtic realms. In the medieval Welsh triads, a storehouse of traditional lore, "one of the three fair princes of the Isle of Britain" is Owein,<sup>1</sup> a name for which the French equivalent is "Yvain." This Owein, who appears as a character in native Welsh poetry and narrative prose, notably in *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, where he is accompanied by a flock of ravens who fight Arthur's men, was in fact a historical king of the late sixth century; he was the son of Urien of Rheged, an ancient British kingdom situated in what is now northwest England and southwest Scotland. While Chrétien's other works contain the names of numerous figures also found in Celtic sources, Yvain is one of the few to have come over into continental romance still associated with his father.<sup>2</sup>

Stories of Celtic provenience, what the French call the *matière de Bretagne*, owed much of their popularity in Chrétien's day to Geoffrey of Monmouth, a cleric who published in around 1136 the fabulous *History of the Kings of Britain*. This book treats King Arthur as one of a long line of British monarchs supposedly descended from Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas, and presents his court as a great center of chivalry and civilized conduct. Geoffrey in fact mentions Yvain under the form *Iwenus*, as the nephew of the king of Scotland. Geoffrey's work was translated into Old French in around 1155 by Wace, who added certain attributes to the record of Arthur's achievements, including the Round Table "about which the Bretons tell many a fable." Wace also mentions that professional storytellers had already associated many wonders and adventures with Arthur. Of interest to us here is the fact that in another work, the *Roman de Rou*, Wace expresses his fascination with the forest of Broceliande in Brittany where, he tells us, according to the Bretons, fairies and marvelous adventures are sometimes encountered and where the fountain of Barenton is found, which causes rain if one pours water over the stone located beside it. Wace went so far as to visit the area but, he reports, came back as great a fool as when he went. Since the *Roman de Rou* was in all likelihood written before *Yvain*, either the legend of the

magic fountain existed in tradition, from which Chrétien somehow picked it up, or Chrétien knew of it from reading the passage in Wace. In any event the fountain in *Yvain* does not appear to be situated in Brittany.

Other notable characters and features of *Yvain* have Celtic parallels: the birds singing in the trees after the storms that Calgrenant and Yvain provoke; the figure of Morgan le Fay, from whom comes the unguent that heals Yvain and who traditionally takes on the appearance of a blackbird; the lady of Noroison, whose name signifies “black bird” and who may have been herself a manifestation of Morgan in some lost source. Certain aspects of three characters—the hospitable lord of the castle with whom both Yvain and Calgrenant stay the night before they reach the enchanted fountain, the gigantic, deformed herdsman who guards the wild bulls and points the way to the fountain, and Esclados the Red—have led scholars to think that they may be narrative descendants of the giant Curoi, a sun god known to us through Irish tales but no doubt also figuring in early Welsh literature, most of which has been lost.<sup>3</sup> Likewise the motif of the hidden name recalls the tale in which the Irish hero Cuchulainn kills his own son in single combat. Other plot devices with folkloric sources include the pouring of water on a stone to bring rain by sympathetic magic (the copper gong in the hospitable host’s castle may have the same relation to thunder) and the magic rings so useful to the hero. Still other elements may have classical sources; for example, the lion’s gratitude may owe something to the tale of Androcles, and some of the comments on love appear to be based on Ovid. But *Yvain*’s major debt is to Celtic traditions.

The only written record of a realization of part of the story, prior to Chrétien, appears in the anonymous *Latin Life of St. Kentigern*<sup>4</sup> written in Scotland between 1147 and 1164. Here, Ewen ( = Owein, Yvain), son of King Ulein ( = Urien), seduces Thaney, the daughter of King Leudonus of Leudonia, that is to say Lothian (compare Chrétien’s version of Laudine’s father’s name, “Laudunet of Landuc”). St. Kentigern, the patron saint of Glasgow cathedral, is said in the *Life* to have been the son of Thaney and Ewen. According to the story, Ewen courted Thaney, but she refused to marry him, and in retribution her father sent her to work as the servant of a swineherd. Desperately in love with her, Ewen sent a woman to try to persuade Thaney to grant him her affection; when this failed, he disguised himself as a girl and met her near a fountain. Through trickery, he led her away to an isolated spot and raped her, as a result of which she conceived the child Kentigern. Ewen then abandoned Thaney. Her father punished her for becoming pregnant by having her thrown from a mountaintop,

but she survived unharmed, after which a clear fountain, no doubt a token of her innocence, sprang up miraculously. Her father then pursued the swineherd into a marsh, apparently under the impression that he was responsible for the conception, but the herdsman managed to kill the king. So at least a decade before Chrétien's work the Yvain figure appeared in a story in which, in league with a female intermediary, he courted and abandoned a lady of the fountain(s) who was associated with a herdsman. Ewen's disguise appears to be analogous to Yvain's ring of invisibility. Chrétien may have been the one to link this story, or more likely—since it was probably a traditional tale taken up by the author of the *Life of St. Kentigern*—a variant version of it, with the legend of the rain-producing fountain.

Chrétien did not, then, make up the story of *Yvain* out of whole cloth. But it is not always easy to tell just which detail is traditional and which original in his romance. This question of sources may be more bothersome to us than it would have been to him, since many a medieval author took pride in the traditional quality of his story. Originality in the sense of the invention of new material was not yet a desideratum that took precedence over other considerations. What is apparent, however, is that the legendary elements from Celtic sources have been demythologized and rationalized, either by Chrétien or by his predecessors; in place of an awareness of mythic meaning, one encounters Chrétien's own concerns for courtliness, personal worth, and correctness of knightly behavior. He never tells us that Laudine and Lunette were once fairies (if in fact he knew); on the other hand, the moral points of his tale have also to be derived from careful reading, since overt didacticism does not appear to have been part of his literary makeup.

A medieval Welsh tale, "The Lady of the Fountain," in the collection commonly known as the *Mabinogion*, tells a story that is an obvious counterpart to *Yvain*. It was once thought that *Yvain* and "The Lady of the Fountain" derived from a common source. It is much more likely, however, that a reading of Chrétien's romance was heard by some Welsh storyteller who retold the tale using elements familiar to his audience and stripping it of most of the characteristics that make it instructive in the ways of courtliness.<sup>5</sup> In "The Lady of the Fountain" Owein does not insult the Calgrentan figure (Cynon), nor does Arthur declare his intention of testing the fountain before Owein's departure from court; no particular motivation is assigned to Owein's pursuit of the fountain's defender, and Owein makes no attempt to convince the lady of the fountain that he loves her. He jousts for three days with Gwalchmei (Welsh counterpart of Gawain) after he defeats Cei (= Kay) at the fountain, eliminating both the need for and the potential

effect of a duel with Gwalchmei at the end of the tale. Arthur, rather than Gwalchmei, lures Owein away from his wife, and the conflict between knighthood and marital obligations is greatly muted since the reason for the separation of husband and wife is not so that Owein can demonstrate his prowess in tournaments, but rather so that Arthur can show him to the nobles of the Island of Britain. Owein's reconciliation with his wife is achieved immediately after he defends Luned, and quite abruptly:

And then Owein, and Luned with him, went to the dominions of the Lady of the Fountain. And when he came away then he brought the lady with him to Arthur's court, and she was his wife so long as she lived. [*The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 180-81]

After this point Owein overcomes the Black Oppressor, in the tale's equivalent to the adventure of the Castle of Infinite Misfortune. The moral improvement that Yvain's character undergoes in the increasingly selfless adventures Chrétien has him undertake, leading up to the reconciliation, is quite absent in Owein's experiences, and the feats the hero performs have no particular progression to them. While the Welsh tale exhibits its own very fine qualities of vividness and color, it differs from Chrétien's romance in tone, in a myriad of details, and in meaning, in ways that highlight the French author's preoccupation with courtly behavior.

Since Chrétien was writing for the court of Champagne, his concerns generally parallel those of the noble class: the behavior of knights and ladies, proper conduct in love affairs, the duties of rulers. One of the most significant scenes in his *Eric and Enid*, in fact, is the couple's coronation, during which Erec wears a silk robe ornamented with scenes depicting the quadrivium—four of the seven liberal arts (geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy) constituting the school curriculum and no doubt the arts most useful for the task of ruling a kingdom. All the more surprising, then, that one of the episodes in *Yvain*, the Castle of Infinite Misfortune (one of those enigmatic “customs,” as Chrétien calls them, institutionalized wonders that dot the hazardous landscape of Arthurian romance, providing adventure for knights who wander in search of it) should present a tableau of economic exploitation—the captivity of the ladies who have been sent as tribute from the Island of Virgins forced to weave silk day after day for slave wages and a miserable allotment of food while they enrich the two “sons of devils” whose tyranny Yvain later brings to an end. The type of concern reflected in this obviously sympathetic image of oppressed workers—even if they are of noble stock—is unique in Chrétien's romances.



Chrétien endows his characters with a good deal of life. The scene in which Yvain is trapped between portcullis and gate, minus his spurs and the back half of his horse, sticks in the mind, as does the one in which the lion humbles himself before his startled liberator. An ironic humor marks Chrétien's portrayal of Laudine's indecorously rapid conversion from inconsolable widow to willing bride, a conversion engineered by Lunette, who feigns to have brought the new husband from Arthur's court when he has been in the lady's castle all the time. The same ironic humor marks the author's account of Yvain's hyperbolic protests of unlimited devotion (11. 2025-32). There is wry comment in the contrast between Yvain's beastly neglect of his lady and the lion's excessive fidelity—to the point of attempting a suicide that is brought to a skidding halt only by the last-minute realization that his master is still alive.

Chrétien has also provided certain enigmas that heighten the reader's interest. Who is the Lady Sauvage who informs Lunette that Arthur is seeking the magic fountain? What sequel can the reader imagine to the flirtatious meeting of Lunette and Gawain, the one linked with the moon by her name and the other traditionally associated with the sun? Did no one challenge the fountain during Yvain's absence? In the end it is not just the vividness of his narration or his deft handling of characters but also his teasing refusal to tie up all the loose ends and comment on all the fantastic occurrences that makes Chrétien's romance one of the high points of medieval storytelling. This quality, coupled with his frequent observations on the nature of love (undoubtedly of burning interest to his immediate audience), sometimes gives the impression that he comments a bit too much on matters for which the modern reader might wish less explication while passing over in silence mysteries that seem to us to cry out for explanation.

*Yvain's* popularity appears to have spread quickly. Within a generation it had been adapted into German in Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein*. It was also translated into Norwegian in the thirteenth century and Swedish in the fourteenth, and the fourteenth-century English romance, *Ywain and Gawain*, derives from it.

Although *Yvain* is a favorite among readers of Chrétien, none of his other works lags far behind in quality. *Erec and Enid* shares with *Yvain* the theme of the proper balance between the duties of marriage and the demands of knighthood, exploring the story of a couple who lack confidence in one another. They find it in a series of adventures that take them away from Arthur's court after their wedding, climaxing in the mysterious "Joy of the Court" episode in which Erec delivers from

enchantment a knight (Mabonagrain, avatar of the Celtic god Mabon) who is the mirror image of himself. *Cligés* also presents an Arthurian ambiance, but its principal hero is the young heir to the empire of Constantinople, which his uncle has usurped from him. Cligés regains the throne after falling in love with his uncle's young wife, Fénice, "the Phoenix," who refuses to commit adultery and become another Isolt but manages through the stratagem of a feigned death to unite herself to Cligés despite all obstacles. In fact, adulterous love is the major concern in only one of Chrétien's romances, *Lancelot*, a work that he wrote at the request of Marie of Champagne and then relinquished before it was finished, perhaps because he disliked the task of presenting the affair between Queen Guinevere and Lancelot in a positive light.

*Lancelot* begins with the evil king Melegant's arrival, one Ascension Day, at King Arthur's court, where he issues a challenge. He will set free those of King Arthur's subjects whom he holds prisoners if any knight is capable of defeating him in battle. But if Melegant wins, his prize will be Queen Guinevere. Sir Kay cajoles Arthur into allowing him to take up the challenge. But Melegant triumphs and leads both Kay and the Queen off into captivity, with Gawain and Lancelot in pursuit. Lancelot manages to make his way to her, overcoming enchantments and other obstacles and undergoing the ignominy of having to ride in a cart, vehicle of infamy, whence the designation "Knight of the Cart." Finally he visits the cell in which Guinevere and the wounded and unconscious Kay are imprisoned, and makes love to her. This leads Melegant to accuse Kay of having committed adultery with the queen, an accusation that is to be tested by judicial combat. Himself sequestered through the machinations of Melegant's retainers, Lancelot succeeds in freeing himself long enough to take part, incognito, in a tournament at which Guinevere is present. Here he fights alternately as poorly and as well as he can, according to the queen's command. He then returns to captivity, but escapes once again from his tower prison to kill Melegant in the judicial combat that takes place at Arthur's court.

The action of *Lancelot* is referred to on three occasions in *Yvain*. The first occurs when Lunette tells Yvain that she would have asked Gawain to defend her against the accusations of unfaithfulness leveled against her:

But some knight  
Had stolen away the queen,  
Or so they told me. And surely  
The king was out of his mind

To let her go anywhere near him.  
It was Kay, I think, who took her  
To meet the knight who carried  
Her off, which disturbed my lord  
Gawain so much that he's gone  
To find her. And he'll never come back  
Until he's found her, he'll never  
Rest.

[11. 3705-3716]

Then when Yvain asks the baron whom he later defends against  
Harpin of the Mountain why he did not attempt to get help from his  
cousin Gawain, he replies:

But a knight from some strange country,  
Who came to that court seeking her,  
Has taken the king's wife.  
He could never have led her away,  
To be sure, entirely by himself.  
It was Kay, who so befuddled  
The king that he allowed the queen  
To pass under his protection.  
The king was a fool, and the queen  
Reckless, entrusting herself  
To Kay. . . .  
Gawain has gone off hunting  
The villain who stole the queen.

[11. 3918-28,3937-38]

Finally, Chrétien tells us that when the younger daughter of the Lord  
of Blackthorn arrived at Arthur's court,

it was just three days  
Since the queen had come back from imprisonment,  
Stolen by Melegant and held  
Along with his other prisoners;  
Only Lancelot had been left  
Behind, treacherously locked

These references to another romance, unique in Chrétien's corpus, are the primary evidence that *Yvain* and *Lancelot* were written at about the same time or even simultaneously. Chrétien may also be evoking *Lancelot* in order to emphasize certain differences between the treatments of love in the two works: Yvain's love for another lord's wife only occurs after the husband's decease, and while in both works love is the reward for chivalric achievements, in *Yvain* the love eventually succeeds within the bonds of marriage and the hero pointedly rejects offers of illegitimate attachments.

With respect to the treatment of love, *Lancelot* is atypical of Chrétien's works. In addition to the fact that he appears to present favorably the themes of adulterous love and the total submission of the lover to his lady—thus reflecting notions seldom found elsewhere in Old French literature proper but current among the troubadours writing in Old Provençal in southern France—in *Lancelot* Chrétien also undercuts the main characters, allowing them to act in ways that border on the ridiculous. He may have been unhappy with the plot and the interpretation presented to him by Marie of Champagne (as he mentions in the prologue), and he might even have attempted to walk a thin line between pleasing his patron and treating the subject ironically. In any case he abandoned his work to Godefroy of Lagny. Nevertheless, both the romance and the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere's liaison were popular in the Middle Ages. In the final book of the thirteenth-century Lancelot—Grail Cycle, *The Death of King Arthur*, the Arthurian kingdom is destroyed as a result of the couple's conduct, and later medieval writers, notable among them Sir Thomas Malory, continued to exploit this theme.

Undoubtedly the most intriguing of the myths that Chrétien propagated is to be found in his final work. In *Perceval* or *The Tale of the Grail* the young and naive Welsh boy Perceval sets off for King Arthur's court in spite of the apprehensions and warnings of his mother. She is stricken with anguish at his departure because Perceval's brothers were killed in battle, which caused his father to die of grief. As Perceval leaves, he turns to look back and realizes that his mother has fallen to the ground, but in his eagerness to become a knight he fails to return to find out what is wrong with her. He succeeds in his immediate goal under the direction of an experienced knight, Gornemant of Gohort, who teaches him the skills of knighthood and also advises him about social intercourse, counseling

the impetuous boy against asking too many questions.

One day, wandering in search of his mother and finding himself in need of a place to stay, Perceval encounters two men in a boat. One of these, a fisherman, directs the knight to his castle, and that evening in the castle hall the fisherman, who is a king, presents him with a sword that will fail only on one unspecified occasion. Perceval watches a procession pass through the hall, consisting of a young man carrying a lance with a bleeding tip, two others carrying candelabra, a maiden bearing a luminous golden grail (a dish on which one might serve a fish at table) set with precious stones, and a second maiden with a silver cutting-platter. But because of his tutor's advice Perceval declines to ask any questions about the grail or whom it serves, or about the bleeding lance. The next morning Perceval finds the castle deserted and just manages to cross the moat as the drawbridge rises. Returning to Arthur's court, he vows not to cease wandering until he has found the lance and learned whom the grail serves. Later Perceval is informed that his mother had died as he was leaving home and that because of his failure to turn back at the sight of her falling he was prevented from asking questions about the grail and the lance. If he *had* asked them, the Fisher King, who had been wounded between the thighs, would have been cured. Five years pass, during which Perceval does not give a thought to his Christian religion. Then, on a Good Friday, he encounters a hermit who turns out to be his mother's brother and who reveals to him that the Fisher King's father is also his maternal uncle, who has lived in the same room for the past twelve years, kept alive by what is served to him in the grail, namely a single communion wafer.

The romance of *Perceval* continues with adventures that Gawain undertakes, and it is thought that the hero himself might have been led back to the grail and lance had Chrétien finished the poem. Its unfinished state gave several other romancers the opportunity to furnish continuations, and two prologues were also added to explain the circumstances that led to the situation Perceval was in at the beginning of the romance. An impressive body of literature arose from Chrétien's *Perceval*. The grail quickly became the Holy Grail (although Chrétien said once that the grail was "a holy thing," he never applied that term to it as an epithet) and was interpreted as the vessel that Christ used at the Last Supper; the lance was represented as the weapon which pierced Christ's side while he was on the cross. Figures such as Wagner, Tennyson, and T. S. Eliot continued to exploit the Grail legend, and it has given rise to numerous interpretations, some farfetched, others plausible.

A progression in the ideals that Chrétien celebrates sets *Perceval* off

from the rest of his works. In *Erec and Enid* the hero and heroine marry with a minimum of amatory preliminaries and only gain confidence in each other through a series of tests. Chrétien depicts in *Cligés* not one but two protracted courtships, and explores the complications posed by chastity with constant depreciatory references to the adultery of Tristan and Isolt. *Lancelot*, probably under the influence of Marie of Champagne, appears to extol adulterous love. The love between Yvain and Laudine evolves with due attention to the analysis of feelings, then is subjected to severe pressure in marriage, but prevails over formidable obstacles. Throughout his career, then, Chrétien is preoccupied with the relationship between knighthood and love. In *Perceval*, however, love between a man and woman, while it is treated as a theme, is secondary to the love of one's kin and the love of God.

The Arthurian romance flourished in France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, both in verse and in prose. These works undoubtedly responded to a need for examining the subtleties of motivation in human conduct, nuances that could not be explored in the other great narrative genres of the period. These were the epic, in which characters' motives are represented through their actions or their words but not through the analysis of their thoughts and feelings, and the saint's life, plainly limited as a vehicle for delving into worldly complexities. In the romance the heroes and heroines tend to act for themselves rather than being emblematic of their societies. They are tested in adventures that they often encounter in unexpected places, by creatures who seem to live according to a set of ethical norms different from those of the ordinary mortal and who share a knowledge that gives them a limited but threatening power over anyone wandering within their reach. The qualities upon which success depends are not so much physical agility and strength (although these do play an important role) as moral and spiritual strengths. The geography of the Otherworld is ineffable, often impermanent, and the creatures who inhabit it are elusive. Against this landscape the destinies of exemplary knights and ladies were played out for the entertainment and edification of noble audiences.

Chrétien's contemporaries speak of him in ways that make it obvious they took delight in his talents as a storyteller. We can imagine them listening to his works being read aloud—much as he depicts the scene in which Yvain comes upon a family in the Castle of Infinite Misfortune:

And he saw a gentleman,  
Propped up on his elbow, lying

On a silken cloth, and a girl  
Was reading him from some romance,  
I have no idea about whom.  
And in order to hear this romance  
A lady had come to lie there  
With them. She was the girl's  
Mother, and the gentleman her father.

[11. 5362-70]

While private reading was a normal practice in the twelfth century, communal scenes such as this must also have been a regular feature of castle life for sophisticated noble families. It is a scene whose pleasures are perhaps not entirely foreign to us today, in an age in which electronic media have made the collective aesthetic experience once again common. To enable us to share in the pleasure of *Yvain*, we now have the lively and colloquial rendering of Burton Raffel. It is an effective intermediary between Chrétien and us, one that is faithful to the tenor of the romance but embodied in unaffected contemporary English, free of all traces of stiltedness and archaicism. To him one can extend the ultimate accolade: a reader coming upon his translation unawares might well think that *Yvain* had been written in English.

J. J. D.

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1. Rachel Bromwich, "Celtic Elements in Arthurian Romance: A General Survey," *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to A. H. Diverres by Colleagues, Pupils and Friends*, ed. P. B. Grout, R. A. Lodge, C. E. Pickford and E. K. C. Varty (London: D. W. Brewer, 1983), p. 43.
2. Rachel Bromwich, ed. and trans., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff: The University of Wales Press, 1978), p. 7.
3. For a discussion of these and other Celtic elements, see Roger Sherman Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949).
4. Alexander Penrose Forbes, ed., *The Lives of S. Ninian and S. Kentigern, Compiled in the Twelfth Century* (The Historians of Scotland Series, 5; Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), pp. 123—33, 243—52. See also Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, "The Sources for the Life of St. Kentigern," in *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 273-357.
5. The conventional features of Welsh storytelling are discussed in Brynley F. Roberts, "From Traditional Tale to Literary Story: Middle Welsh Prose Narratives," in *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics*, ed. Leigh A. Arrathoon (Rochester, Michigan: Solaris Press, 1984), 211-30.



## Recommended for Further Reading

The following short list includes books particularly suitable for the student reader.

### Medieval Texts

Andrew the Chaplain. *The Art of Courtly Love*. Translated by John Jay Parry. New York: Columbia University Press, 1941.

Chrétien de Troyes. *Perceval or the Story of the Grail*. Translated by Ruth Harwood Cline. New York: Pergamon Press, 1983.

*Early Irish Myths and Sagas*. Translated by Jeffrey Gantz. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1981.

Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Translated by Lewis Thorpe. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1966.

*The Mabinogion*. Translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones. Everyman's Library. Revised edition. New York: Dutton; London: Dent, 1974.

*Trioedd Ynys Prydein. The Welsh Triads*. Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by Rachel Bromwich. Cardiff: The University of Wales Press, 1978.

Wilhelm, James J., and Laila Zamuelis Gross, eds. *The Romance of Arthur*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984. (Includes William W. Kibler's translation of Chrétien's *Lancelot*).

### Critical Studies

Frappier, Jean. *Etude sur "Yvain ou le Chevalier au lion."* Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1969.

———. *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work*. Translated by Raymond J. Cormier. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1982.

Kelly, Douglas. *Chrétien de Troyes: An Analytic Bibliography*. Research Bibliographies and Checklists, 17. London: Grant and Cutler, 1976.

Kelly, Douglas, ed. *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes, a Symposium*.

The Edward C. Armstrong Monographs on Medieval Literature, 3.  
Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Publishers, 1985.

Lacy, Norris J. *The Craft of Chrétien de Troyes: An Essay on Narrative Art*. Davis Medieval Texts and Studies, 3. Leiden: Brill, 1980.

Loomis, Roger Sherman. *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes*.  
New York: Columbia University Press, 1949.

Topsfield, Leslie T. *Chrétien de Troyes: A Study of the Arthurian Romances*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.